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OR,

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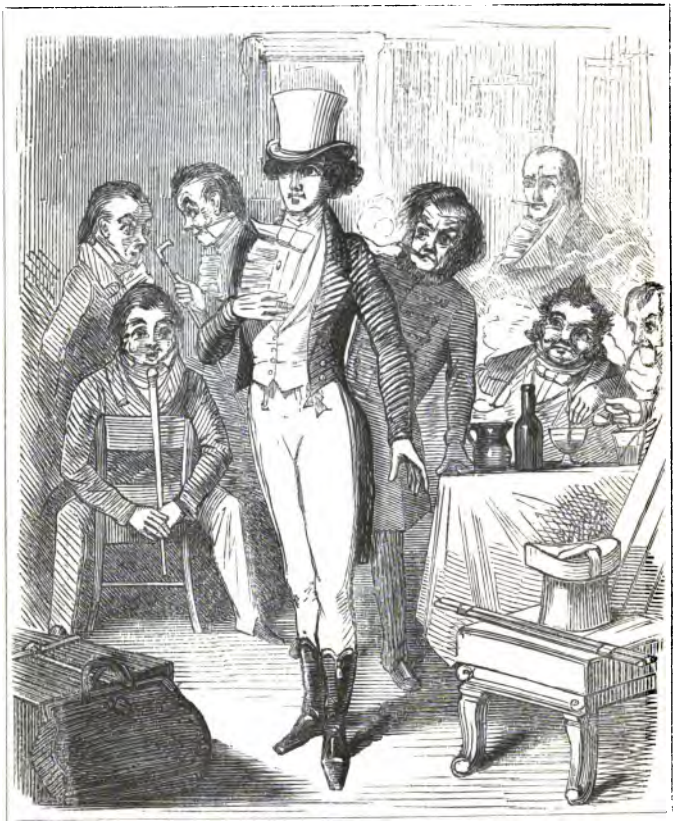

A SUBSCRIPTION BEAU.

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WHICH IS WHICH?

OR,

MILES CASSIDY'S CONTRACT.

A Picture Story.

BY

ROBERT B. BROUGH.

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WHICH IS WHICH?

OR,

MILES CASSIDY'S CONTRACT.

CHAPTER I.

CASSIDY THE MISER.

In spite of Miles Cassidy's victorious attack on the cold mutton recorded in the last chapter, and the burst of energy he had displayed in resentment of Ted's injurious implications, our old friend was no longer, either physically or mentally, the powerful man he had once been. A sad change had come over him since his fruitless journey to London. He had returned home greatly shaken and depressed; and from that date forward the visible decline of his faculties had been rapid and progressive. His hair was whitening fast. He had grown much thinner. The stoop in his shoulders had increased.

"The busy wrinkles round his eyes"

had deepened and multiplied. His powerful voice

had lost much of its clear metallic ring. And his once firm hand was occasionally seen to tremble.

But it was mortal offence to Miles to hint the truth that he was "age-ing," or even "ailing," and that his system required more repose and care than formerly. He indignantly scouted all such insinuations. He declared himself in better condition than ever; and, to prove it, took to rising an hour earlier and working an hour later than had been his previous custom. It was an unfavourable sign, that he had latterly begun to boast of faculties which he had been formerly content to exercise quietly. He was never tired of talking of his enormous muscles, his excellent appetite, his powers of enduring fatigue and hunger, the huge masses that he could lift, and the incredible distances he could walk. He would gratuitously overtax his powers in the endeavour to persuade others—still more to persuade himself—that his boasts were well founded. He would show that he could lift the weight and walk the journey; but the weight made him stagger and pant unwontedly, and the end of the journey too often left the pedestrian footsore and exhausted. Miles's victories were all tantamount to ruinous defeats.

But the moral change that had come over him was greater even than the physical one. His spirits had lost their wonted buoyancy. No more quaint sallies of Irish fun passed his lips: his work was no longer

enlivened by cheering scraps of melody. A few months ago, the fireside evenings of the little family had been charming. It had been Cassidy's delight to listen, over his well-earned pipe of rest, to some passage of romantic history, some wondrous incident of travel, or some gem of poetry that Frank or Biddy had encountered in their studies, read or expounded to him by one of his darlings, in order, as he used cheerily to say, "that he might sniff the flavour of the larning he was feeding them with, to see if it smelt wholesome." All this was at an end. Time was too precious to be wasted in listening to idle tales and poethry! The pipe itself had been abandoned, much to Biddy's regret, as an uncleanly and expensive superfluity.

But—worse than the whitening of locks or the bowing down of shoulders!—Miles Cassidy had suffered depreciation in the priceless gift of Good Repute. His very nicknames he had changed for the worse. He was no longer "Cassidy the Irish," or "Mad Cassidy," but "Cassidy the Miser." It was an ugly burr for a suffering and keenly-sensitive man to carry about on his back, but Miles had fairly set himself up as a mark for it, and once thrown, it had stuck to him. Excuse his daily-increasing penuriousness as he might, to himself, by the secret consciousness of a laudable motive, his neighbours could only pronounce judgment upon the patent facts of the

case. Miles Cassidy's excessive avarice might perhaps be justified; at any rate there was no disputing it. Hitherto he had been esteemed as a shrewd but fair-dealing bargainer, with a respectable eye to the main chance, but with a good heart, and, on very sufficient occasion, with an open hand. He had now passed the barrier which separates so estimable a character from that of a grasping and not over-scrupulous money-grubber. He was now said to be morose and churlish to the needy, but servile and fawning to the rich. He was a less liberal and certainly a less popular employer than he had been—more exacting of work and more grudging of payment. He was said to stint his family of the common necessaries of life. He was known to employ idiots and paupers—Soft Jimmy and Mrs. Quelch to wit—in the place of more efficient servants, from obvious motives of economy. What else? He was pronounced a merciless creditor, a nipcheese, a skinflint. In a word, he was "Cassidy the Miser;" and being fully installed in the possession of that dignity, was, as a matter of course—proving the soundness of the astute Sir John Vesey's axiom, "that if a man can once get the reputation of being stingy he is sure to have the credit of being rich"—believed to be rolling in wealth.

There was a good deal of smoke in all this undoubtedly, but there was a little genuine fire at the

bottom of it. Miles *had* become more grasping and less generous: he would court and cringe now where he would formerly have stood erect and aloof; and he had saved money. But, as usual, the public were only vaguely and partially right. Miles was still a much better and a much poorer man than he was believed to be.

The charge against him, for which there appeared the most legitimate and direct foundation, was that of a certain unscrupulous eagerness, bordering upon indelicacy, and certainly wanting in dignity, with which he would seize upon any chance of making money—no matter how compromising or degrading, provided it were not positively illegal or unjust—that might offer itself. For instance, no one who had known the thrifty but independent Miles Cassidy of six months ago would have credited that, for the sake of a few wretched pounds a-year, he would have exposed his beautiful and unprotected niece to the inconveniences of a position so oddly exceptional as that of a private tutor to a man of Cymon Pyebush's rank and damaged reputation. Cymon himself, though conscious of the purity of his intentions, and fore-armed with Biddy's own consent, had yet fully made up his mind that his desperate proposal would be rejected by the strict and high-minded carpenter, as "not the thing;" and had prepared himself for a fresh defeat at the hands

of the relentless Apollyon, Failure, who had hitherto got the better of him in every one of his attempted passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Difficulties. To his surprise and everybody's, Miles not merely entertained but jumped at the proposal with something like slavish avidity. Here was a new field of emolument open to the family. Biddy could prepare gentlemen for the University. The Honourable Cymon was requested to fetch his books and begin at once.

Terms were soon fixed—a little higher than Cymon had calculated, it should be stated—and the hours of study regulated. The only improvement Miles had to suggest in the arrangement was, that the proposed daily task should be doubled, or even trebled (to be paid for in proportion, of course), in order, as he observed, "to get over the ground quicker." This was overruled. Cymon, who was not particularly charmed by his first experiences of this phœnix of carpenters,—regarding the facility with which Miles had fallen into an arrangement which he himself had felt so much delicacy in proposing, as the proof of a coarse and vulgarly-rapacious mind,—felt it his duty to point out the possible inconveniences that might arise from a public misapprehension of his visits to the house. He mentioned his original plan of engaging some mature female relative or friend of the family to be present during his lessons, in order that

the most fastidious proprieties might be appeased. Miles at first scouted this proposition, as absurd and superfluous. He said, very simply and truly, that Biddy required no looking after, being perfectly well able to take care of herself. But on the matter being urged, and backed by the powerful argument of a small increase of terms, spontaneously offered by the disinterested Cymon, Miles perceived the necessity with miraculous clearness and rapidity. The next day he went to Oxford, and returned accompanied by our old acquaintance, Mrs. Quelch, whose services he had secured in the capacity of *femme de ménage*. Miles had been actuated by his old mixture of motives in this engagement. The widow was extremely cheap. She was in deep distress—trembling, in fact, on the threshold of the workhouse, towards which her hopeful son (at that time a prisoner) had been rapidly driving her. It would be a charity to provide her with a home, and at the same time to protect her, as far as might be possible, from the rapacity and persecutions of her unnatural offspring. Moreover, as we know, she was under obligations to Miles, who well knew that he would find in her a willing slave.

The emoluments arising from Mrs. Quelch's engagement were infinitesimal, while the duties attached to it were considerable. In addition to "taking the chair" in a genteel and matronly fashion

during the Honourable Cymon Pyebush's classical *séances*—an occupation which pleased the poor soul immensely, by giving her a sense of high breeding and scholastic dignity agreeably in accordance with her bygone pretensions—she was expected to superintend the cooking, washing, and mending of the establishment—Biddy's new occupation, with increasing duties in the workshop and counting-house, leaving that young lady little time for the mere pursuits of housewifery.

"It's hard on the poor crathur, darling," said Miles, remorsefully, to his niece one "pay-day," eyeing a microscopic heap of coin that was set aside for the poor widow's weekly remuneration. "Mighty hard! and it goes agin the grain of me to be pinching and screwing them as serves me. But we must help each other as we can. It's a help to her to have the crust and the roof. Without it she'd be in the poor-house, or worse—ate out of house and home by the blackguard son of her. She's a help to *us*, any way. They tell me, without her I shouldn't be doing right (though that's a matther I haven't rightly brought myself to understand yet) in letting you 'arn money that you ought to be proud of. Proud! Bedad, I should think so. Where's the fine young lady, *I*'d like to be towld, out of the carriages and ball-rooms, as could plane and polish up a blatherumskite, harum-scarum, good-for-nothing chap like Misther Pyebush

(it 's himself that says it: a steadier, betther-behaved gintleman *I* never set eyes on) into the shape and make of a dacent clargyman—for it 's that you're transmogrifying him into, as fast as you can, he says. Faith, they 'll be making him a bishop some day, and there 'll be a rare piece of work for the lot of us to brag we was the first to give a hand's turn to! And the poor, shivering, friendless, foreign chap there—don't we help *him?* And every pinny everybody helps us to, isn't it seed for the harvest that may be wanted one day for the saving of the poor lost sheep away there in London, that 's wandering off——where?"

"We all strive to do our best, uncle."

"Sthrive!—sthrive! But the sthriving goes for nothing if the best isn't done at last, alanna. HELP ONE ANOTHER, AND DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY. Them 's wonderful words, dear. But the task they set is a hard one, and one that 's never been done yet, to my thinking, in this world, with man's good word to the back of it."

The circumstances attendant upon Mr. Giovanni's domestication in the establishment were not redundant to its master's credit. The antecedents of the foreigner, as we have seen, were a mystery; and he certainly brought no powerful personal recommendations with him, pecuniary considerations apart, that should have claimed for him admission to the circle

of a virtuous English family. He was evidently ignorant and vulgar-minded, being unable to read, or even speak—as the polyglott Biddy soon discovered—his own language correctly. All the account he gave of himself was, that he had been a gentleman's servant, and had retired upon his savings. He seemed to have a great deal more money than the best-paid serving-man, as society is organised, should be able to acquire honestly. Also, he had preserved some of the most slavish habits that a long residence in the land of Goshen is apt to inculcate: for instance, his forehead nearly touched the ground whenever the Honourable Cymon Pyebush crossed his path. And to this dubious specimen of flunkeyism *en retraite*, Miles Cassidy, himself hitherto as noble a specimen as could be found of the noblest social type that exists—the brave, intelligent, and independent labourer—would doff his cap, and cringe, as to a superior being. To him Miles had given up his own room; for him, Miles would run errands, and perform menial offices, spontaneously, and as a pleasure.

Why? Because Mr. Giovanni was ailing, and appeared rich; because he had declared himself friendless and alone in the world, and, actuated by a natural feeling of gratitude for a service accidentally performed, had attached himself to the Cassidy family.

The real or imaginary pecuniary wants of our old

friend had actually degraded him to the ignoble level of a legacy-hunter!

As might be expected, the accident caused by poor Jimmy's over-officious zeal disconcerted Miles not a little. In the first place, the wounded man had to be provided for on the premises. Justice and policy alike necessitated this. The injuries caused by his unreasoning henchman, acting upon his own instructions, Miles regarded precisely as though they had been inflicted by himself. And Miles was still a just man, whatever his neighbours might say. In the second place, he dreaded a public investigation, which might have been prejudicial to poor Jimmy's liberty, at the same time depriving Miles of a serviceable biped, who discharged many of the functions of a cart-horse and a watch-dog. The presence of her sick son, moreover, would most likely be a serious drawback on Mrs. Quelch's utility. The house would be neglected. Mr. Giovanni, not finding his comforts attended to as hitherto, might find his gratitude and attachment begin to cool a little, and withdraw his patronage. However, there was no help for the evil, but Miles's old, and never-yet-failing remedy—work it off.

On the morning after Sam Quelch's accident, and the excitement caused by the discovery of Sir Paul Evershed's letter (which it may be needless to say had dropped accidentally from the treacherous bearer's

pocket), Miles was up and at work an hour earlier than usual. The whole family followed his example: it was the surest way of pleasing him, and a species of practical flattery which he never failed to appreciate. Ted, in open and avowed rebellion and malecontent since the advent of Cymon Pyebush, inaugurated a truce by performing prodigies of labour and ingenuity before breakfast. Biddy posted every amount on the day-book, and achieved wonders in the invoice line. Poor Widow Quelch surpassed herself in efforts of housewifery, striving by forced cheerfulness and activity to wean attention from the damaging truth that she and hers had brought additional expense and acre into the household. Sam, it should be stated *en passant,* was not so badly hurt as had been supposed. His leg was not broken after all, but awkwardly dislocated: he had also received some severe flesh wounds and contusions. He had been pronounced unfit for removal for some days to come; and lay cursing and groaning (not altogether sorry, though, for a calamity which had procured him board, lodging, and the attendance of his mother, for an assured period), in the sleeping-loft over the boat-shed, which Jimmy had been compelled to do penance by vacating for the patient's accommodation.

It would seem that early stirring and unusual activity in the Cassidy establishment were contagious

on the morning in question. For to the astonishment of everybody, Mr. Giovanni was up, dressed, and abroad, actually before it was warm! That mysterious foreigner excited considerable emotion, in which the ingredient of popular approval was not altogether wanting, by displaying (at last) something like a tendency to definite action. He hired a vehicle, in which he gave audible instructions for his immediate conveyance to Brayle Manor. This was not much for curiosity to feed upon, it is true—the branch question thus opened on the main line of inquiry, namely, "what possible business could take Mr. Giovanni to Brayle Manor?" being rather calculated to whet than to appease the appetite. Still it was movement, if not progress.

Mr. Giovanni was driven to Brayle Manor, where he requested the favour of an interview with Sir Paul Evershed, at that time an honoured and influential guest in the establishment. The request was granted, and Mr. Giovanni remained closeted with the baronet for a considerable time. The particulars of the interview have not transpired. At its conclusion Mr. Giovanni returned to his conveyance, and was driven back to the town.

He found his landlord in the little counting-house, auditing accounts with Biddy. He informed the uncle and niece that he had been occupying himself successfully with their interests; that he had seen

and spoken to Sir Paul Evershed, and that they need apprehend no further annoyance from that personage. Miles looked blank at this assurance, and mentally cursed his valued friend and lodger as an impertinent meddler. Mr. Giovanni divined his thoughts, and hastened to set him at his ease by the assurance that he (Giovanni) had, by his unexplained influence, rendered the susceptible baronet not merely innocuous, but, as the result would speedily prove, actively beneficial to the family interest.

Miles didn't believe him. He was convinced that the over-officious foreigner would prove to have been the means of embroiling him with a good customer. But the evil, if any, was done; and Miles was keenly awake to the impolicy of "throwing good money after bad." He reasoned that, if he had offended Lady Harriett Brayle, he was less than ever in a position to afford the extravagance of offending Mr. Giovanni also. So he thanked that personage for his good offices, with well-assumed heartiness.

In the course of the afternoon a messenger in the livery of Brayle Manor made his appearance at Miles Cassidy's door, where he delivered two letters. One was addressed to the master of the house; the other, in a different handwriting, to Signor Giovanni. The contents of the latter epistle have not been ascertained. The former was worded as follows:—

"BRAYLE MANOR, *October*, 1820.

"Lady Harriett Brayle will be glad if Mr. Cassidy can make it convenient to meet her man of business at her residence to-morrow, at 11 A.M., relative to some improvements on an extensive scale recommended by her kinsman, Sir Paul Evershed, in the manor-house, which she is desirous of entrusting to Mr. Cassidy's execution."

The same evening Mr. Giovanni hobbled into the workshop, and beckoned out Edward Cassidy. He took the young man by the arm, and led him through the boat-house down to a secluded nook by the riverside. There he drew from his pocket a flat morocco case, which he placed in Edward's hands.

"There," he said, "take that, *mio figlio*. That will make you all well."

"What is it, Mr. Giovanni?"

"Look and see."

Edward opened the case, and saw that it contained a set of jewels, consisting of a necklace, brooch, and ear-rings. They were of bygone fashion; but, as even his unpractised eye could tell, of considerable value.

"What am I to do with these, Mr. Giovanni?"

"Give them to her; to la Brigitta."

"What! a present from you?"

"A present? yes—yes. From me? no—no. That would never do. Who am I? An old man, ugly and crippled. It is not me she must love. From yourself."

"You are very kind, I am sure, sir. But if I were to give such things to my cousin, I should have to tell her where I got them, and the present would be yours, after all. You may as well have the credit of it. She wouldn't value them any the more for coming from me. Depend upon that, sir."

Ted spoke the last words very bitterly.

"There you are wrong. I tell you they are all alike—the best and the worst; and la Brigitta is the best alive, I own. But they are weak—all. I have seen! Trinkets, jewels, great names, fine manners, all dazzling things, will catch them at first, like moths,

till they burn their wings and die. A man's worth and love, that would feed them, clothe them, keep them alive, and make them happy, they cannot see while these things dazzle their eyes."

"I am afraid you have a low estimate of the female character, Mr. Giovanni," said Ted, smiling.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no. I have seen! I would have you happy, and la Brigitta. But she cannot see you in the shadow of il grande Signore, the lord's grandson. She does not know that your face is handsomer and your heart better than his. You have not his name, his dress, his fine manners. Fight him with his own weapons. Give her the pretty things, then, and she will look away from him at you."

"But how should I say I came by the possession of such valuable articles, Mr. Giovanni?" Ted asked, curious to follow out the drift of his singular patron.

"*Cospetto!* you have bought them," was the laconic answer.

"But my cousin, whose opinion of me, I am sorry to say, is low enough already, would despise me all the more for committing such an extravagance, even if she believed me. She knows that I am over head and ears in debt, through my own folly, and am in daily fear of my father finding it out, which would make the breach between us wider than ever."

"How much?" Mr. Giovanni inquired, putting his hand in his pocket.

Ted stared. This looked like business.

"Well, my debts are really a very small matter, Mr. Giovanni," he said awkwardly. "But they amount to more than I could ask a man of whom I know so little as yourself to help me to."

"How much?"

"Well, I'd been going the pace a little, you see. I can't help attributing it to Biddy; though, I own, it isn't fair to do so; but I should have been a different man, if she'd only——"

"How much, *mio figlio?*"

"Why, the fact is, there were a lot of small sums, and fearing they would come to the governor's ears—which would have driven him wild in his present saving fit—to cover the whole amount, I got a Jew in Oxford to do a bill for me."

"How much?"

"Forty pounds."

"Good! you shall have twenty in the morning. You shall show him ten, and he shall renew for the rest. I know them. I have seen, I tell you! The sight of money to them is like the trinkets to women: they cannot refuse it. You shall spend the other ten in new clothes, to cut out the Signor Pyebush. And you shall give her the pretty things to-morrow. It is her birthday; she will be flattered."

"But, at best, she can only think I have run into debt afresh to make her the present."

"Bah! And if she does? She will blame you for being foolish, but you will have been foolish for her. She will forgive it. You shall tell her those pretty things you have had your eye on for months and months, to buy and give her. It has been difficult to you, but you have succeeded at last. Give them to her."

"Really, Mr. Giovanni, I have no right to accept such a valuable present."

"You have—all. I have no mother, sister, child, or wife. You are all to me—you here! Those things are mine to give—mine by right. I have paid their price. I will not tell you what they cost. You would not believe. They are yours, but only for la Brigitta."

Mr. Giovanni hobbled away, leaving Ted in a state of astonishment, with the open jewel-case in his hand.

The next morning Mr. Giovanni made a second excursion to Brayle Manor. On his return he placed two crisp Bank of England ten-pound notes in Edward Cassidy's hands.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CONFINES OF BOHEMIA.

LET us leave our provincial friends a while to their various employments, and see what kind of progress Mr. Frank Gerald is making in *his* chosen department of industry—namely, the manufacture of that great name which is to be offered as a colossal wedding present to Miss Bell Evershed, which by its eminence and value is to compensate her for the lowliness of her bridegroom's origin and the smallness of his fortune; by the light of which Frank will be emboldened to bring forward the homely figures of his hard-working kinsfolk, and to own them without shame, transfigured as they will appear in the all-pervading glory of the Great Name's radiance.

Well, at any rate, the great name is not made yet. The plans may be prepared, the ground laid out, the building materials even provided; but the Pharos tower itself has not yet begun to astonish the world by its miraculous growth and proportions. When

the lanterns will be up and alight, is matter for the widest speculation. Few people, indeed, are aware that such an edifice is even in contemplation. Of those who are in the secret, and who have inspected the site and foundations, the majority are by no means sanguine as to the architect's prospects of success. There is a prevailing opinion among such judges that the design will have to be abandoned at an early stage, for want of necessary capital.

But let us visit the architect himself, and ascertain his own feelings on the important subject.

The author of *Anne Boleyn and other Poems* had fixed his town residence in the central situation of Salisbury Street, Strand; a locality much affected in our own time by the literary neophyte, and, in many respects, more especially if Poetry happen to be his chosen path in the field of letters, one admirably adapted to his purpose. Salisbury Street, as some of my readers may require to be informed, is one of a cheerful family of parallel *culs-de-sac* lying between the roaring Strand and the salubrious Thames, devoted exclusively to the reception of lodgers, and each resembling the others much as a hospital bed or a prison cell resembles its neighbours to the right and the left. A locality more rich in the materials for a course of poetic training could scarcely be imagined. In the first place, the essential element of GLOOM is all-pervading. Salutary lessons, too, in the desirable

art of PATIENCE, the struggling bard may acquire from communion with the Local Genius. For Salisbury Street (with its neighbours—*ex uno disce omnes*) not being a public thoroughfare, and consequently offering no temptations of residence to classes engaged in the really grave pursuits of life, such as weighing tea and sugar, measuring calico, negotiating time-bargains, issuing writs, or sweeping crossings—all of which notoriously require the most tranquil absorption of the intellectual faculties — has been abandoned by municipal wisdom from time immemorial to the lively exercitations of Punch, of the street-bands and organs, of the plaintive unemployed from the manufacturing districts, of the flying stationers, of the stentorian purveyors of vegetable food, and (latterly) of the Ethiopian serenaders, making it altogether an admirable retreat for the study of literary composition, under difficulties — to grapple wherewith of course the aspiring poet cannot be taught too early.

The Poet's Eye will seldom have a chance of rolling in finer frenzy than in Salisbury Street, where the very blacking exasperates; where the window-frames are instruments of acute torture; where the bell-ropes are merciless Laocoon serpents, entwined about the necks of Hope and Tranquillity; where the toasting-fork goads to desperation, and the teapot spout points the way to madness; where the latch never agrees with

its ill-assorted key; where the most solid and bulky provisions evaporate as by magic, through mere exposure to the influence of an exceptional state of atmosphere; where a weird and fiendish race of cats disturb the lodger's repose by night, and by day nourish an unearthly progeny, avowedly at his expense, on an unnatural diet of loaf-sugar, preserved fruits, mould candles, and, in extreme cases, of copper and silver coin of the realm.

Then, what vast fields are open to the resident bard in the desirable regions of DOUBT! Your true poet should never be sure of anything, on this side of the grave even. In Salisbury Street he can be certain of nothing, the trifling ingredients of dirt and incivility, perhaps, excepted. There he will find all fathomless problem, inextricable bewilderment. What has become of his soap? Obvious suspicion would point to his landlady. But does she ever wash? Somebody must have been using his favourite comb, —a matted legacy of female tresses is there to attest the liberty. But who could have taken it? Certainly not the maid-of-all-work. Look at the state of that grim-handed Phillis's *coiffure* when she next answers the bell—if you don't mind waiting—and you will acquit her of any such presumption. Some other "drudging goblin" (not of the Miltonic order, assuredly, or he would have had the decent gratitude to perform a little drudgery on your account—made

the bed, for instance) must have visited the apartment during your absence, for toilette purposes. Such an hypothesis may help to account for the disappearance of two pounds of the best Latakia, and three-quarters of a previously unopened bottle of Hollands. There you have the materials for a speculative poem at once!

I believe it is considered indispensable to the poet's successful development that he should experience the pangs of Misunderstanding, Remorse, and Blight. He need not go further than Salisbury Street in order to reap rich harvests of all three. With Despair and Death, moreover, in their most repulsive aspects, he should be familiarised. Let him make the experiment of a six-months' residence in Salisbury Street, with no material resources but the emoluments of his poetical genius, and at the end of that term he will most likely arrive at a due comprehension of the former. With regard to the latter, "if the worst comes to the worst" (as it most likely will, unless he has the luck to inherit a fortune, or the sagacity to emigrate), why, is there not the river Thames, at its very thickest and creamiest, curdling invitingly at the bottom of the street, fenced by a convenient iron railing, not difficult to climb, and just the height for a standing jump with a good purchase?

It was in the inner apartment of a modest second-floor suite in this inspiring locality that Mr. Frank

Gerald awoke one morning—a raw, foggy one, by the way, in the month of November—in his bed, where he should have been, and rang his bell.

It was not answered for several minutes. This elicited no surprise from the ringer,—he had occupied the apartments for some weeks, and was familiarised to the local manners and customs. So he rang again, as a matter of course, and waited a few minutes more. Still there was no answer. Frank rang a third, a fourth, and a fifth time, each time with increasing violence, but still unsuccessfully.

Then the poet bounced out of bed in a towering passion, and burst open the door of his sitting-room, determined to try the effect of ringing the changes on a second bell. Our poor friend had no conception that he was being more than shamefully neglected. But the conviction that he was so, acting upon his poetical *amour propre,* made him very indignant indeed. Had he divined the truth, namely, that an active conspiracy was on foot against him, having at the same time a full knowledge of its motive, he would have felt rather humiliated than angry.

The sight that met his eyes was distressing in the extreme. I have stated that it was the month of November. I should add that it was already broad daylight—as broad as it was likely to be in that neighbourhood, and at that season. At such a time in the morning Frank had hitherto been accustomed

to find his fire lighted, his boots polished, his breakfast prepared, and to be welcomed from his mouldy, stifling sleeping apartment, by the comparative cheerfulness, at any rate, of such conventional substitutes for domestic comfort as the place afforded.

He was now, for the first time, horrified by the sight of an empty grate, to which not even the cold civility of black-lead had been applied. His favourite Hessians lay grovelling abjectly on the bald hearthrug, just as he had left them on retiring to rest. Books, papers, and articles of wearing apparel lay strewn about the room in nocturnal confusion. The crowning horror was a small tray covered with a filthy napkin, rendered more hideous by the poverty-stricken remains of a bread-and-cheese supper, flanked by the ghastly apparition of a pewter pot!

The state of things was obvious. In domestic parlance, "the room hadn't been touched!"

Still Frank was angry, and not yet ashamed. He felt himself outraged—unconscious that he was being despised—and was determined to know the meaning of it. He seized the bell-handle furiously—that inestimable safety-valve provided for the outlet of lodging-house indignation!—and continued working at the crank till his exertions were rewarded by the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

Very heavy footsteps they were, as of feet apparently slipshod, and in no hurry. Their sound was

accompanied by the distorted notes of a popular melody, sung by a female voice of imperfect cultivation.

These were ominous indications, as Frank's quick instincts told him, of defiance and insubordination. But what could it mean? he hurriedly asked himself. The people had hitherto behaved civilly enough to him. He owed no rent but that for the week just completed, and that he had not even been asked for. However, the approaching footsteps reminded him that he was not in a fit state for the reception of female visitors. He retreated to the bedroom, where he extemporised a hasty toilette, and returned to see a slatternly, shapeless hulk of a girl, with her shoulders planted against the post of the open door, her arms folded, and her feet thrust forward in an easy, nonchalant attitude. She was munching a crust between the snatches of her melody, which she showed no disposition to discontinue on Frank's appearance, neither did she attempt any change in her comfortable position.

"Margaret, what is the meaning of this?"

"Missis sent me up to see if you was a pulling the house down," was the answer, accompanied by a broad, malicious grin.

This was intolerable. The girl evidently understood and enjoyed the lodger's discomfiture. The leering Margaret indeed, from the undisguised delight

with which she contemplated the misery she had helped to create, was a striking illustration of the principle referred to by an eminent modern critic in explaining the rogueries of Scapin, *La servitude qui se venge.*

"Why am I treated in this manner?" asked poor Frank, appealing by a pathetic gesture, more eloquent than words, to the confusion around him. "What have I done to deserve it?"

"Nothing as I knows on," Margaret answered, absorbed in the progress of a cartoon she had just commenced designing on the door panel with the smutty tip of her finger.

"Is it by your mistress's orders that I am neglected like this?"

Margaret raised her head slowly, and brought a pair of roguish, deep-set eyes gradually to bear upon the speaker's face as she drawled out, through an unctuous chuckle, the significant word:

"E-e-es."

Frank turned crimson, and bit his lip fiercely. He was fairly overwhelmed with shame, anger, and astonishment. His curiosity was piqued; but he could not further compromise his already dubious position by parley with the grinning menial before him.

"Enough!" he said, with as lordly an air as he could assume. "I will not remain in her house another hour. Tell her to make out my bill."

"Oh! she 've done that."

Margaret produced a greasy slip of paper from under her apron, and contemplated the success of the little dramatic surprise she had thus prepared with excusable pride and satisfaction.

Frank glanced at the amount—it was very small! and made a dart at his purse.

Alas for the impulses of human dignity! This movement, to have been crowned with success, should have been followed by the production of a handful of gold pieces, to be thrown royally on the table, with instructions to the presumptuous dun to pay herself from the amount. Poor Frank had the mortification of finding that his entire stock was less than the sum claimed by the humiliating deficit of two-and-eightpence.

He blushed to a deeper crimson than before, and huddled the insolvent purse into his pocket. Margaret was in raptures.

"Tell your mistress I will return in a few minutes and pay her," said Frank. "Tell her, also, that I am at a loss to understand the meaning of conduct which is not merely disobliging and unfair, but positively dishonest."

"Then you can tell the second floor, Margaret," said a cracked, flurried voice from the staircase, "that your missis ain't mean herself, and that she can't abide meanness in others; and them as won't live and let live had better move off, and make room for them as will, with a good riddance!"

The last few words were almost drowned in the noise of rustling garments, and of footsteps hastily retreating towards the lower regions. This unseen

enemy had evidently fired her only shot, and retreated without waiting to see its effect.

Poor Frank had fallen into worse hands than those of a shrew. His landlady was a coward. Her instincts and policy were those of the assassin rather than of the pugilist. When she wanted to rid herself of an undesirable lodger, her constitutional timidity forbade her to tell him so. She found it easier, by a decisive and unexpected *coup*, to make life in her establishment at once intolerable to him.

"You can follow your mistress," said Frank to the grinning Margaret.

Margaret prepared to do so in the same leisurely manner as had characterised her entrance; but, suddenly seized by a compassionate impulse, she turned on the threshold, and thrust her head back into the room, as she said benignly:

"I say, shall I put you up to summut?"

"What do you mean?"

Margaret winked, grinned, and pointed over her shoulder towards the staircase.

"She have let the rooms. I 'spose you know *that?*"

"I presume so. What then?"

"Why, you know she ain't give you no notice, and you can stick to 'em if you like—a week."

"Thank you. I have no desire to do so. Leave the room."

Margaret was not offended. She had not yet explained herself fully, and doubtless anticipated more courteous treatment when her motives should be better appreciated. She closed the door cautiously behind her, and advancing stealthily towards the astonished Frank said, in a confidential half-whisper:

"But you 've no idea how it would rile her! She 'd be like a wild cat. *I* would if *I* was you."

For all his vexation, Frank could not help feeling amused at the girl's odd perversion of good nature. She really seemed sorry for him, and offered him a chance of vengeance, as something that might do him good.

"Why so?" he inquired, smiling.

"Why, you see it 's a gent have lived here afore, as is walking the 'ospittles. He only sent last night to see if he could have the rooms, and if he can't come in to-morrow, he 'll have to go elsewheres. *That 's* why I wasn't to do your room or answer the bell this morning. So, if *I* was you, I wouldn't go, jest only to serve her out. She 'd tear the very hair off her scraggy old head, and nothing short. *He 's* the one to spend money, and never look at his bills, he is; which his father pays 'em at the end of the quarter, and nice rows they has; and she 'd go right down raving if he was to slip through her fingers."

Frank's sense of the ludicrous had come famously to his rescue. He had recovered his temper and

patience sufficiently to encourage the girl in the continuance of her queer revelations.

"But, if your mistress wished me to make room for a more profitable lodger, why could she not say so?"

"Ah, that's where it is, you see! She can't sauce nobody, only me. Bless you, you might have rang the bell all day, if I'd been out of arrands, it wouldn't ha' been answered. She'd no more dare to face you than a roaring lion."

"Am I then such a terrible personage?"

"Terrible! not you, indeed! It ain't that. You see, you was all very well at fust—lived and let-lived, as she's so fond o' saying. There was three chops then where there's one now; and gentlemen to supper, sometimes with sherry wine, and spirits, and lobsters, and highsters, and I dunno what"—(Miss Margaret, however, smacked her lips as if she had some savoury recollection of such delicacies)—"and nothing as ever went down-stairs was asked for; and it *do* make a difference, that you must allow."

Poor Frank! and this was his reward for a rigorous and self-denying exercise of the patent virtue of retrenchment, for having laboured to square his expenditure with his income. He had striven to pay his humble way, and had succeeded. He found himself turned into the streets, and voted "mean"

in consequence. He had become poor of late, and had committed the grave worldly mistake of practically owning it. Had he pretended to be rich, his timorous landlady would cheerfully have ruined herself by feeding him on the fat of the land for months to come.

"That will do, Margaret. I have no wish to subject myself to a repetition of this morning's annoyance. I will return shortly for my things. Here is half-a-crown for yourself."

Frank tossed the coin to her with a magnificent air. The girl caught it briskly, looking at the donor with a shrewd expression of mingled gratitude and pity. She rubbed the piece on her apron, and picked at it with her finger nails, as though she would have liked to detach and restore, at least, a portion of it. Her hand, however, closed only partially and reluctantly over it, as she said slowly:

"Thank 'ee, sir, I 'm very much obliged to you; if you 're quite sure you can spare it?"

"Perfectly well. You are quite welcome. I will return in half an hour."

Frank hastily put the finishing touches to his toilette, which had been progressing fitfully during the above conversation, and hurried down-stairs into the street. A special Providence must have attended him through both operations, otherwise it is more than probable that, in his blinding rage and confusion,

he would either have broken his neck or forgotten his inexpressibles.

The "touch of nature" manifested by the obvious reluctance of the spiteful drudge to accept his gratuity had affected him more keenly than any of his morning's experiences. It had told him how really poor he was, and, still worse, was known to be. A man must look hungry, indeed, when the street beggar refuses a share of his crust.

Frank reached the Strand in a few angry strides. The business of the day had fairly set in, and the great stream of life was already surging to and fro, along what perhaps may be called the central street of the world. Frank saw gold on every side; basking in the shop-windows; bulging from the waistcoat-pockets of office-bound citizens; plastered on the coach panels; streaming from the hats and shoulders of the livery servants; but there was none lying to be picked up on the pavement.

Our young provincial, however, was long past the Whittingtonian phase of inexperience and credulity, and had anticipated no such prodigy. Frank was already half a Londoner; but, as will be seen, only half. He had yet to learn one great principle of metropolitan life; namely, that whatever you want to do in secret, the nearer home you do it the less liable you are to detection. There is no man in London who knows or cares so little about you as the man

next door. Frank was not yet fully aware of this. He had come out of the house with the immediate design of pawning a ring. He could have done this conveniently at the top of his own street, and nobody would have been the wiser. But he was a provincial, and measured London by the standard of Oxford or of A——. It might be talked about in the neighbourhood!

If Frank had been less eager to pay his lodging-house bill, and to sit down to a subsequent breakfast somewhere or other (for he was only twenty-two, and had, oh! such an unpoetical appetite, with digestion to correspond), it is possible that he would have wandered to the uttermost verge of London civilisation ere he had ventured to negotiate the transaction he was contemplating. As it was, he bent his steps in the direction of Westminster Bridge Road, whither he had the modesty to believe the eyes of Europe might possibly not care to follow him. In this thoroughfare, having carefully assured himself, by glances to the right and to the left, that no reporters from the daily newspapers were dogging his footsteps, in order to make literary capital out of a great man's necessities, he darted precipitately into a pawnbroker's shop; produced his ring, as if he had just stolen it; accepted blindly what was offered to him upon its security; and tumbled, like a drunken man, out of the shop—into the arms of his ac-

quaintance Mr. Charles Evershed, Assistant-Under-Secretary of State for the Unexplained Department, who happened, at that particular time, to be visiting a seriously-disposed parliamentary acquaintance in the neighbourhood of Clapham, and who walked to Downing Street on the dry mornings to economise coach hire.

"Holloa! I say!" said the diplomatist, recovering his equilibrium, and recognising his aggressor. "How are you? Who the deuce would have thought of meeting you *here?*"

By "here," the statesman Charles only meant the Westminster Bridge Road; an unfashionable locality, in which he was rather ashamed of being seen, on foot, himself, and in which he was quite astonished to meet an acquaintance whom he had previously encountered "in society."

But Frank thought "here" meant the pawnbroker's from which he had just emerged, a fact of which the Assistant-Under-Secretary might have remained unconscious. The shop might have been a stationer's, a tobacconist's, or a pastry-cook's, for anything he had observed, had not Frank in his bewilderment brandished the duplicate of his ring, which he had not had the presence of mind to pocket, before the diplomatist's eyes, and rashly proceeded to further gratuitous explanations.

"I am extremely sorry," Frank spluttered inco-

herently; "quite ashamed, in fact! The first time in my life such a thing ever occurred to me. But all men are liable to accidents of the kind, and I beg you will not mention it."

"Mention what?"

Frank, in popular parlance, felt "sorry he spoke." He crammed the convicting document into his waistcoat pocket, and would have changed the conversation. But he was too late. Mr. Charles Evershed had divined the situation. He had glanced from the duplicate to the shop-window, from the window to the door, above which he had recognised the Lombard arms, towering in all the significance of their globular and golden majesty!

It was an awkward dilemma, certainly, and one that might be attended with inconvenient results. But the danger was not precisely what it appeared at first sight, either in shape, magnitude, or proximity, through the distorting lens of our unlucky poet's alarmed and feverish apprehension. Frank felt like the spider in the fable, who, on finding his web invaded by a housemaid's broom, is reported to have exclaimed, "Heyday! the world is coming to an end, then!" His world—an ideal one of his own spinning—the gossamer comforts of which had even made his dark corner of the roof in Salisbury Street habitable, seemed rudely swept from the face of creation. He had been detected by Bell's eminently re-

spectable cousin in the disgraceful act of visiting a pawnbroker's establishment. He was ruined. Of course Mr. Evershed would denounce him to the family. He would be scouted and despised for what he was, a needy adventurer. The whole truth must out. Hard-working, illiterate father — plebeian, dissipated brother — pauper childhood — youth of drudgery — eleemosynary education — all would be brought ruthlessly to light. The term of probation he had desired for the manufacture of the great name that was to reconcile all social discrepancies would now be denied him. He was an utterly "gone 'coon." Hope was extinguished, energy crushed. The cobweb was swept to atoms. Gerald's occupation was gone. Frank glanced from a chemist's shop-window at his side towards Westminster Bridge in front of him. Should it be prussic acid or the river?

All this condensed agony and despair was the result of Frank's being a poet or an Irishman, or both—at any rate, a person addicted to the mental exercise of jumping at conclusions—and was based on an altogether false and too favourable estimate of Mr. Charles Evershed's perceptive faculties. Frank assumed as a matter of course that the quick-sighted young diplomatist had embraced all the bearings of his position at a glance. Mr. Evershed had in reality discovered nothing more than that Frank had been

pawning a ring for the sum of twelve and sixpence (he had possessed himself of the contents of the duplicate with surprising quickness and accuracy), and was immensely confused at being detected in the transaction. Beyond this Mr. Charles was utterly in the dark, and his inquisitive little intellect had already fallen busily to work, groping for a glimpse of daylight.

Mr. Charles—a good fellow in many respects, and not without ability of a certain kind—was one of those unfortunately constituted seekers after truth who, as the proverb goes, are unable to see wood for trees. The dark-blue diplomatic spectacles he had worn for some time past had not improved his mental vision. He was addicted to diving in the mud for motives that lay floating on the surface of the water. Mr. Frank Gerald, his supplanter in the affections, as he conceived, of his beautiful cousin, was a mystery he had long been anxious to fathom, for many reasons. The stream was shallow enough, Heaven knows; and a common observer might easily have seen to the bottom of it—ay, even touched it with a walking-stick. But Mr. Evershed must needs bring all the pickaxes, breakwaters, and diving-bells of diplomacy to bear upon the operation, by means of which he had hopelessly muddled the waters. He could not make Frank out at all. The poet's appearance in this new phase of desperate impecuniosity

puzzled him more than ever. How a man of fashionable bearing and high literary attainments, the betrothed husband, moreover, of a wealthy heiress, and a distinguished member of a great University, could be reduced to the ignominious necessity of pawning a ring in the Westminster Road—and for twelve and sixpence!—entirely baffled his comprehension; and therefore must be a very complicated problem indeed, requiring, and fully meriting, the wariest and most elaborate investigation. Mr. Charles Evershed resolved to spare no pains in hunting out the solution—which poor blundering, open-mouthed Frank was only in too great a hurry to throw at his head.

"Aha! I see," said the diplomatist, with a gay laugh, thrusting his arm amicably into Frank's; "our mutual uncle, actually! Worthy Samaritan! And you have really been constrained to pay him a visit on this exceedingly dismal morning, eh?"

"There would be little use attempting to disguise it," Frank answered, sulkily, feeling his cheeks burn.

"Disguise it!—why should you? It would be the height of ingratitude to our obliging relative. Besides, between friends and men of the world, where is the occasion? There is nothing to be ashamed of in it. It is a thing I have often done myself."

This was not Truth, but it was Diplomacy. And, as will often happen in the exercise of that weapon,

it gave an advantage to its employer's adversary. Frank's *naïve* astonishment at the confession—which he believed implicitly—got the better of his confusion, and gave him time to recover himself.

"*You* have?"

"I!—Why not I, as well as another?"

"What on earth could ever have reduced a man in your position to such a pitiful and degrading strait?"

Ahem! Mr. Evershed was not quite prepared with his answer. He coughed and stammered a little, but at length articulated:

"Oh, a dozen things. A frolic over-night exhausting the exchequer—something like your own case, I suppose. Now and then a fine at a police-court, perhaps. Hang it, man! you don't suppose I'm *all* white cravat, red tape, and spectacles, do you? I may be a few years older than you, perhaps, and have what is called settled down into respectability. Ha! ha! But I've had my fling with the wildest of you, I can assure you."

Frank ruffled up indignantly at the implied suspicion on his morals and sobriety.

"You are quite mistaken," he said, warmly, "if you attribute my present necessities to any such cause as you allude to."

"Necessities!—eh, the deuce! You don't mean to say you are actually—pardon the expression—hard up? No, surely!"

"If I were not, I should scarcely have been reduced to do what you see I have been doing."

Frank glanced ruefully at his naked finger, where the twelve-and-sixpenny ring had been.

"The deuce!—No, really! But how on earth has that happened?"

"Very simply. I have been unsuccessful with my pen lately; perhaps not as diligent as I might have been; and am just in the position of other workmen out of employment."

"Workmen?—Just so—I understand. The pen?—of course. But you have other resources and expectations."

"Resources! None for the moment—expectations plenty."

"He must have friends," thought the diplomatist—resuming aloud, "But your engagement with my cousin Bell holds good? No hitch there, eh?"

"None that I am aware of."

"Then how, in the name of fate——?"

"What can my engagement with your cousin have to do with my being in want of a guinea?"

"To be sure—to be sure!"

"You don't suppose I would annoy her with my paltry temporary difficulties, do you?"

"My dear fellow, out of the question. (Come, they are only temporary, and he speaks of them as paltry!" the diplomatist added to himself.)

"Or, even if she knew all about them, which I don't intend her to, do you imagine I would suffer her to relieve them?"

"Why, of course not! As if I meant anything of the kind! I merely thought——"

"What?"

"Nothing."

Mr. Charles had perhaps reflected, in his worldly wisdom, that most gentlemen of his acquaintance, with Frank's brilliant matrimonial prospects, would have found means of discounting those prospects in the money-market, as readily as any other reasonable worldly expectations. Frank Gerald puzzled him more and more, at the same time earning his increased respect. The young diplomatist was a great admirer of uprightness and simplicity—at all events in theory, and in the practice of other people. Moreover, there were a few strings in connection with Mr. Evershed's heart, about which the meshes of red tape had never been entangled. One of these had been touched by the spectacle of a well-bred gentleman—whom he was disposed to believe he ought to think well of—reduced to the want of a few shillings, perhaps of a meal.

"But what do you mean to do, my dear fellow?" he resumed, kindly. "This sort of thing can't last. We can't allow you to pay even a flying visit to the dogs. Won't your own family do anything for you?"

Frank glanced keenly at the speaker. Had he a suspicion as to what that family was? Apparently not.

"You are very kind," he answered coldly; "but I am not on friendly terms with my family at present."

("Come, he has a family," thought the politician.)

"I am sorry to hear that. Those things are always painful. I wish my own powers were greater; but I am a mere hanger-on myself, without influence; and I assure you I have drains on my poor resources that you can have no idea of. Still, if a few guineas would be of any service——"

The diplomatist displayed a purse—rather a lank one for a man of his standing—and fingered two or three bright golden pieces. It was a sore temptation, especially backed as it was by a certain unmistakable kindliness in the proposer's manner. But Frank was now on his guard. He was determined to recover some of the ground he believed he had lost by his precipitate candour. He had sufficient strength of mind to refuse the bait.

"You are very kind, and I thank you most heartily. But I would rather not borrow."

"Tut, man! Why not?"

"For one reason, perhaps, I may not know when I should be able to repay you."

"What nonsense! Even if you never did?"

Frank laughed with forced gaiety as he replied:

"I see my visit to 'our mutual uncle,' as you call him, has laid me open to a variety of misconceptions. I am not yet reduced to the necessity of almstaking; and, I trust, am not likely to be. Still I thank you for your offer, again and again."

("Devilish proud!" thought the diplomatist. "Must have resources somewhere.")

"You must not think me ungracious!" Frank resumed. "My case is really not so bad as it appears. With a little exertion I can soon set myself to rights. You caught me under most ridiculous circumstances; and you know, as the French say, *le ridicule tue.* That was all. I am detaining you. Good morning; and very many thanks for your friendly offers."

"You are sure you won't take three or four?"

"Not one, I am obliged to you. Good-by!"

"Stop! Have you any commands to Brayle Manor?"

"Not any, I thank you. I correspond regularly, as you may suppose."

"Just so. Only I thought, as I intend running down there in a day or two for a week's shooting——"

"You do?"

Frank had changed colour—for a moment only.

"The old lady has invited me. It appears her health is better, and they expect a lot of people down

there for Christmas. I should have thought you would have been of the number."

"Now I think of it, I shall probably run down myself to-morrow," said Frank boldly, and with perfect composure. "I have a standing invitation, of course."

"The deuce!—I mean, I am delighted to hear it. Can I do anything for you in the gun line?"

"Thank you. I have my own; rather old-fashioned, but a very good one. We shall meet in Berkshire. Till then *au revoir*, and many thanks."

"Good-by!"

The two young men shook hands and separated.

"I must get down there before him, at all hazards," said Frank, as he hastened towards Salisbury Street to pay his bill, and recommence life on a capital of seven shillings and threepence. "It is venturing into the lion's den, I know, to risk my presence in the old neighbourhood. But I must take my chance. I need not go too near the town, and I may be safe while I confine myself to the preserves and plantations. I will not give up Bell without a struggle. If this pink-eyed fellow gets there before me with the story of this morning's adventures I am ruined. Curse all social inequalities! Or, if they must exist, why was I not born a baronet's son and Bell a carpenter's daughter? At any rate, I am glad

I didn't take his money, though it was really kind of him to offer it."

"He is the most inexplicably baffling customer I ever met with," said the Assistant-Under-Secretary of State for the No-Earthly-Consequence Department, as he picked his way through the mud of Parliament Street towards the daily scene of his patriotic exertions. "The idea of his being engaged to 8000*l.* a-year, pawning a ring in the Westminster Road for twelve and sixpence, refusing the loan of a guinea, and having a gun!"

The diplomatist was deceived. Frank had never possessed a gun in his life.

CHAPTER III.

BOHEMIA ITSELF.

FRANK GERALD, for all his poetry, could be a man of energy and resolution, once having a settled purpose in view. He had made up his mind that it was his duty or policy to go down to Brayle Manor, and to present himself there, as the detestable phrase runs, "like a gentleman." He was determined to accomplish this by some means—honest ones, of course, he flattered himself. What these were to be was at first by no means apparent. Indeed, the task seemed not unlike one of those cruel labours imposed by wicked fairies on captive princesses in the story-books, such as to fell forests with glass hatchets, to catch salmon in nets of cobweb, and the like. Frank's wardrobe was not in an absolutely dilapidated condition, but it had attained to an autumnal stage of seediness, ominous of dissolution. Fine broadcloth coats of glowing plum-colour, or dazzling bottle-green, were beginning to dawn white at the

seams; velvet collars, once of towering majesty and raven blackness, were seen to droop and pale; embroidered vests were frayed and "dogs'-eared" at the pockets; pantaloons of superlative cut were turning glossy and thin at the knees; cambric shirts displayed serrated wristbands, and, in some cases, perforated frills and bosoms. Frank's cravats were old and out of date. His hats, too—bell-crowned beaver, and crescent-shaped *chapeau bras*—were limp with much bowing and hugging. Worst sign of all, our unfortunate beau was conscious of the seeds of consumption having been sown in that most vital part of a gentleman's external system—the boots. Yes! there was a perceptible crack (the crack of doom, it might be called, were not the subject too serious for levity) in the upper-leather of one of Frank's darling Hessians! These were his only wear, with the exception of a pair of tops, degraded from their ancient splendours by the ignominy of a patch. For a top-boot patched is an escutcheon blotted, a mirror shattered, a snow-flake in the mud.

Cheap tailoring was an invention as yet undreamed of. There was no royal road to a fashionable "get up" in those days, except one or the other of those royalest of all roads to everywhere and anything—Cash or Credit. The latter Frank had never taken any pains to secure in his season of outward prosperity, and of course could not suddenly invoke it in

his hour of necessity. His havings in the former commodity we have been made acquainted with. Yet Frank was determined to go to Brayle Manor, and to go in splendour. Nothing short of an entire re-casing from top to toe would effect this. How was it to be managed? The cost of a gentleman's outfit forty years ago was no flea-bite. A hat meant guineas plural. Gloves represented crown pieces. There were sumptuary laws, too — none the less rigorous for being unwritten—of which we, in a time of sartorial democracy, when prime ministers wear three-and-sixpenny "wideawakes," and honourable members go down to the house in loose-fitting velveteen, know nothing—laws which exacted the wear of the finest linen, broadcloth, and beaver alone, leaving such cheap substitutes as then existed to the shopman and the *roturier*. There were minor indispensables also, of which we are happily spared the inconvenience and responsibility, in the shape of waistcoats, under-waistcoats, and waistcoats under them again, all costly affairs in their way. Many, too, and ruinous, were the devices in outer coat and wrapper for various occasions, none serving for the other — box-coats, pelisses, walking-coats, cloaks, spensers, and what not. Every gentleman was expected to display a sufficiency of all these, under pain of suspicion of poverty. Unless, indeed, he happened to be a lord or a millionaire, in which case he could

do as such people have been privileged to do in all ages—that is to say, exactly as he pleased.

Frank looked his difficulty boldly in the face. Thirty pounds, he calculated, would be the very lowest sum that would enable him to accomplish his design, and he possessed seven and threepence! He was not entirely without friends in London. A few old college chums were within hail—sensible, considerate fellows, of the Steadman class—who had never despised Frank for the lowness of his origin, and who were in his confidence, approving of his change of name as a measure excused if not necessitated by policy. But these men were much in his own position—struggling authors or barristers for the most part. Frank had also made some literary acquaintances among the wilder tribes of Bohemia—the *condottieri*, the free lances, in too many instances the mere camp-followers and plunderers, of the army of letters. These men were amusing, and, in many respects, instructive companions for a leisure hour. But help from them was out of the question; the poor knaves could not help themselves. Moreover, Frank was not the man willingly to seek or to accept help. There was enough of Miles Cassidy's blood or of Miles Cassidy's training in his system to make him self-reliant and independent. The money he wanted he resolved to work for. A resolution easily taken, but *l'homme propose*, &c.

Frank's first task was to remove his slender stock of household gods from the inhospitable vicinity of Salisbury Street, and hire a single room in a less expensive neighbourhood. Here he sliced up an immense quantity of paper into a convenient form, and sat down with the intention of dashing off a story, to be converted immediately into money. This is one of the common mistakes of literary youth. They believe that marketable works of art can be "dashed off" under pressure of immediate necessity. Did you ever try it, my literary brother? Frank Gerald, feeling himself for the time Samuel Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith in one, sat down, bent upon improvising a story that was to be completed in less time than *Rasselas*, and summarily disposed of for at least the price of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. He little reflected upon the years of suffering and experience which had enabled those two men of genius to write each a little book, the one to pay his expenses to his mother's funeral, and the other to satisfy his vindictive landlady.

For a day or two Frank covered the paper bravely, and, though conceit was certainly not one of his failings, almost to his own satisfaction. But the progress he made was far too slow. He began early to doubt his "dashing off" powers. The anxieties of his position distracted his attention, and the demon of impatience got hold upon him. This evil spirit

was further excited by a letter from Bell, full of affection, but also of uneasiness and alarm. She wrote that her cousin Charles had come down to visit them, and, in spite of the formal renunciation of his claims, showed unmistakable signs of renewing his pretensions to her hand. To this he was evidently urged by his father, who appeared to have regained all and more of his former influence over the young man. Father and son, Bell went on to say, missed no opportunity of reviling the absent Frank, whose prospects they were evidently bent on undermining. Her grandmamma, very much broken in health, appeared unaccountably under the control of Sir Paul Evershed. Briefly, the fair writer hinted pretty broadly that Frank's best course would be to come down at once to Brayle Manor, and endeavour to hold his own.

Frank hastily finished a few chapters of his story, and started with his manuscript on that dreary expedition known as "the round of the publishers." He was courteously received everywhere (publishers are not of necessity ogres), but in all cases with repulse. One bookseller regretted that he was "full for the season." Another liked the opening pages immensely, but could come to no decision till he had seen the finish of the manuscript. A third was not a publisher of fiction, but he had heard Mr. Gerald's name favourably mentioned, and would be happy to

treat with him for a biography, if he had a work of that description sketched out. And so on throughout the circuit.

Frank immediately changed his tactics. To finish the story, his good sense told him, would take him at least a month, and that month should be one of undisturbed study. He sat down and "dashed off" (literally this time) a leading article on an interesting question of the day, which he took to the editor of a daily newspaper, with whom he had some acquaintance. The editor liked the article, printed it, and gave Frank two guineas for it, requesting him to write some more at the same price. Frank thought his fortune made at once. Alas! his political knowledge was of the slenderest description. Article number two, on a given subject with which our author was not familiar, obstinately refused to be "dashed off." It required patient "reading up," and when completed proved a failure. The editor could not insert it. Article number three was more successful; but this too was on a stubborn topic, and by no means repaid the labour that had been expended upon it. Frank worked like a slave at his new vocation; but a fortnight slipped by, and he found that only four of his articles had been inserted, and, in consequence, paid for. This would not take him to Brayle Manor.

He was a strong, courageous young fellow, and

could bear disappointment better perhaps than most of us. But one day he received a letter from Bell, to the same purport as the one alluded to, but more urgent and desponding in its tone than ever. For the first time the young lady appeared to express some reluctant doubt of her lover's good faith. What was to be done? Should Frank give up the battle? No. He still felt himself worthy and hopeful of victory. But his hopes were dashed the same evening by a note from the editor, returning his last article, and informing him that he need not trouble himself to write any more. It was friendly but decisive. The practised judge had discovered that Frank had no real aptitude or enthusiasm for the arduous duties of journalism, and counselled him to return to a more congenial form of literary expression.

Frank felt fairly beaten. He had no longer the satisfaction of a foe to grapple with. The "fight" that he felt within him was useless. He had nothing to do. In a fit of desperate idleness, he sauntered into a tavern near the Strand—a well-known stronghold of the Bohemian forces—with no other intention than to smoke, talk, and forget. Frank was no drinker.

The tavern parlour was a perfect Tower of Babel, noisy with the confusion of many voices, some of which, better directed, might have "discoursed most eloquent music" to ages yet unborn. This place was

the house of call for misdirected genius, or for still more hopeless misapplied ambition, wrongly conceiving itself to be genius. In one corner of the room sat a drunken poet asleep (he had been hungry two hours ago, but somebody had given him brandy, and he had forgotten it), a man who could speak, write, and *think* in some half-dozen languages with equal facility; who had written poems that had melted women to tears, and trenchant essays that had led to the alteration of treaties; but who had given, not sold, himself in voluntary slavery to a political party, the heads of which deplored their serf's liking for gin-and-water, but somehow forgot to tempt him with bread-and-beef, as a possibly satisfactory substitute. There was a clever landscape painter, who had misplaced his affections on an impossible tragedy of his writing, which he spent the greater part of his life in futile endeavours to get produced at one of the London theatres; neglecting his profession and fairly ruining himself in purchasing the good graces of actors, who could do him and his hopeless bantling no possible service. There was a young lawyer of good family, who had once had the misfortune to play a part in an amateur performance, and who believing, in consequence, that he had a vocation for low comedy, had rushed wildly on to the stage—thereon predestined to deliver letters, and say, "My lord, the carriage waits," for the remainder of his natural life,

at a salary never to exceed thirty shillings per week. There were two or three able, successful men in the room — writers who were conscious of their own powers, and had been wise enough to apply them to the right uses. These men came to the tavern either for mere relaxation, or for pure business purposes, as to the proper place for the study of reckless and eccentric life, just as they would have gone to Covent Garden for flowers, or to Billingsgate for turbot. The rank-and-file of the assembly consisted of parliamentary reporters waiting their turns in the gallery; idle men from adjacent inns of court, glad of any escape from the irksome solitude of chambers; actors and musicians, come to refresh themselves after their nightly exertions; perhaps here and there a stranger from the country, who had drifted into the place by accident, and sat aghast, torturing his unsophisticated brain in hopeless efforts to divine what strange race of men he had fallen amongst.

Frank took his seat at a table occupied by a number of young men of his acquaintance—chieftains, for the most part, of high repute in Bohemian annals. His arrival was the signal for a shout of enthusiasm. Frank was popular amongst these odd-fellows, though he had mixed but little with them. Reckless, dissipated, and, in some instances, thoroughly vicious as they were, they were most of them gentlemen by education; and they liked Frank's agreeable, un-

obtrusive manners. Moreover, they respected him as a member of the University, and, let it not be forgotten, because he had generally appeared among them with money in his pocket.

The first greetings over, a bluff, jolly fellow of thirty odd, in an enormous pair of whiskers, moved, in delicately shrouded language, a resolution to the effect that the new-comer should contribute towards the general refreshment of the society.

"I'll stand a bowl of hot water and empty pipes round," said Frank, with desperate gaiety; "that's all I'm in a position to afford this evening."

"Extraordinary!" said the stout individual with the whiskers.

"Lamentable!" said another.

"These disgusting coincidences are constantly occurring in history," said a third. "Do you know, Mr. Gerald, we had just made the painful discovery that there is no money in London?"

"Quite a mistake," a fourth observed, sententiously quoting from a City article. "Money is plentiful, but holders are firm."

"I'll tell you where it is all gone to," said another, as if he had lighted on a brilliant discovery. "Every bit of available capital in the metropolis has been absorbed in the purchase of Raffles's new coat."

"Shame!"

"Culpable extravagance!"

"Flat dishonesty!"

"How dare you, sir, in a time of commercial pressure like the present," said he of the whiskers, bending a look of severity on the wearer of the new coat, "commit the offence of *lèse-patriotisme* to the extent of pampering your worthless back at the expense of your friends' stomachs?"

"I move that the coat be sequestrated and disposed of for the public good."

"I wish you'd let my unfortunate coat alone," said Raffles, who was a hot-tempered medical student, of no very acute mental perceptions; "you've been chaffing it all the evening. Can't you change the subject? I suppose you've all had new coats at some time or other."

"Unfounded assumption, boy! Look around you, and tell me what visible grounds you have for any such supposition?"

"I had a new coat once!" said a tall, melancholy-looking man, with a sigh. "But it gave me ideas above my station! made me indulge in visions of hats and waistcoats to correspond. So I parted with it as a ruinous superfluity."

"Why, Long," said one of the party, turning to the last speaker, "I thought you had tick for coats?"

"No! only boots."

"Oh, boots, is it?"

"That's all. Stop! I forgot; and *eau de Cologne.* I have lived on them for some time."

"Do you take them mixed or separate, Johnny dear?" inquired the whiskers.

"Oh, served up in a variety of ways. But it is getting monotonous, and it cannot last much longer. I look forward, without regret, to my last breakfast of fried Wellingtons with Jean Maria Farina sauce."

"But mind you, John," said an envious *confrère,* "boots and *eau de Cologne* are not to be despised. They can be transmuted into cigars and trousers by proper chemical treatment."

"I have exhausted all experiments. My tobacconist prefers cash to calfskin, and my tailor's wife beats him, so he won't indulge her with perfumery. I mean to try it on with a handsome confectioner woman at the corner of our street. If it answers it will be a good move. A man can hold out a long siege upon veal patties and jellies."

"It's very odd," said a young musician, reflectively; "but I can get hats and grocery to any extent, while I'm hanged if I can raise the hire of a piano. If I could, I'd compose an opera, and make all your fortunes."

"At any rate you'd give us orders for the first night's representation," said Mr. Long.

"I'm all right for a month of Sundays," said an

actor out of an engagement; "my landlord 's a butcher, and passionately fond of the drama."

"Where does he live?" inquired half-a-dozen eager voices.

"That 's my secret."

The bluff man with the whiskers rose from his seat, and knocked against the table with his glass.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "attention, or rather silence, you noisy fools! I've got a brilliant idea."

Marked incredulity was expressed. The speaker continued:

"It has just occurred to me from the confessions we have just listened to, that this gifted, but I regret to add, unprosperous fraternity, is possessed of vast latent resources, rendered comparatively useless by want of proper application. It is undoubtedly a disgrace to the age we live in, that among the ornaments to art and literature I see around me (Hear!) there is not one that has the slightest prospect of ever presenting the complete appearance, or leading for a single week, the real life of a gentleman. (Groans, and 'Too true!') But it appears to me, that scattered among our members we have the materials for—well, let us say, *one* gentleman at least. We have seen that our prodigal, but, I trust, penitent friend, Mr. Raffles, has at least a good coat. Mr. Long pleads guilty to the possession of unlimited boots. A third honourable member is rich in the essential elements of hats and

groceries. Not that tapioca or mixed pickles can be successfully applied to the external decoration of a gentleman's person. But such treasures are convertible. You are, doubtless, acquainted with a French game of forfeits—for we have all indulged in those innocent recreations at no very remote period—(Oh! oh!) I shall not notice the sneer—which is called 'making a Venus.' The penitent is bound to compose his ideal of a Venus by selection from the various charms of the ladies present. Thus he takes the eyes of one, the nose of another, the complexion of a third, and so forth—a pretty and graceful invention for the distribution of harmless compliment. Now, gentlemen, I propose that we apply this principle materially, and unite our various resources for the composition, not of a Venus, but of an Adonis. If we cannot all shine in the fashionable world, let us do so by deputy. I am sure that we possess ample means for turning out a model individual, who would do us credit in that elevated sphere where it must be confessed our body has been hitherto most inadequately represented. Gentlemen, I have done. Consider my proposition, and let your gratitude take any form of expression you please to give it."

The speaker then sat down amidst much laughter and jingling of glasses.

"It really wouldn't be a bad idea," said the musician, "if we could only get fair play. But the

reciprocity would be all on one side, as the Irishman says. The contributions would be unequal."

"Not necessarily," said the proposer. "For instance, you could get a hat to-morrow, our friend Long a pair of boots. Mr. Raffles, I am willing to believe, would repeat that herculean effort that has been crowned with such marked success to-day, and extract another coat from his mysterious resources. For my own part——," the speaker paused.

"Ah, yes! How about your own part, Bloss? We are curious to hear that."

"My own contribution to the common glory, gentlemen, I flatter myself you will not pronounce the least munificent. I propose to lend my personal appearance and the graces of my conversation. Yes, gentlemen, I offer myself as the raw material, or canvas, for the glorious design in contemplation. Behold your Adonis!"

"Oh! oh! I dare say! Off! Sit down! Walker! Don't you wish you may get it? Ha! ha!"

Mr. Bloss sat down once more—this time, overwhelmed with the public disapprobation.

"Joking apart," said the composer, when the din had subsided, "the design would be really magnificent; but it would fail through the very considerations Bloss has just indicated in fun. Every man would want to be the representative Adonis. If we

could take it in fair turns, we might marry heiresses, dazzle publishers and managers, and take the world by storm. We might start a newspaper or a theatre. We might keep a carriage and pair amongst us. But every man would want to write all the leading articles, and to play Hamlet, and we should be always fighting for the use of the horses. It's no go, depend upon it. There is not sufficient honour among—gentlemen of our condition."

A wild idea had shot through Frank Gerald's brain. What if this *bizarre* scheme, born in a jest, and intended to die out with the laughter it had provoked, could be actually carried into execution on his own behalf? It was a forlorn and desperate hope. But he would try it. He started eagerly to his feet, and claiming attention by a vigorous thump on the table, exclaimed, with an earnestness of eye and manner that turned the thoughtless jokers to seriousness:

"By heaven, gentlemen, if you can put that scheme in practice for me, I don't promise to make all your fortunes, but you will be the means of making mine, and I am not an ungrateful man."

The Bohemians looked at him in wondering interest.

"I say, that if among you you can supply me with the means of cutting a good figure for a week or so, you will save me from ruin—which means,

you will see me the master of a good estate, where you will all be welcome guests, I can tell you."

This looked like a business proposition. The chiefs of the Bohemian camp solicited further explanations.

Frank gulped down the choking shame he felt at proposing what he knew to be a disgraceful kind of bargain. But he was reduced to desperation, and this was his one chance. He took aside a few of the *convives*, whom he considered the most discreet and trustworthy, and admitted them to his confidence. He told them exactly how he was situated (suppressing only the fact of his humble origin); how his marriage with a wealthy heiress, backed by the consent of her legal guardians, was imperilled during his absence; that he had not the means of asserting his claims for want of a presentable appearance. He pointed out the advantages all would derive from one of their number being elevated to a good worldly position. The Bohemians perceived this—doubtless exaggerating it in their sanguine temperaments. Briefly, a conspiracy was entered into to equip Frank Gerald at all points, and send him forth to victory.

They sat late at the tavern; Frank, for the first time in his life, drinking more than was good for him. He woke in the morning with a splitting headache and a still more insufferable attack of burning remorse. How heartily he felt ashamed of him-

self for having profaned the chaste subject of his love by making it the topic of a tavern conversation! He tried to think of it as a mere passing freak, that would have no serious consequences. His Bohemian acquaintances, he thought, would forget all about their compact with him in the morning. He was mistaken. So hopeless was the worldly condition of these men, that they were too ready to seize upon the wildest chance of a helping hand that might one day lift them from their stagnant obscurity. They had taken Frank perfectly *au sérieux*, and they kept their word to a man. One came to him, while he was at breakfast, with an introduction to a fashionable tailor —procured Heaven knows how. The young musician introduced him to the confiding hatter he had spoken of. Mr. Long made a liberal contribution of boots: Fortune permitted that his foot and Frank's should prove exactly of a size. The painter, who had written the unactable tragedy, lent our hero half-a-dozen superfine shirts. One man contributed a ring, another a faultless umbrella. Shawls, gloves, whips, and jewelled canes, were forthcoming by some inexplicable agency. The contribution of Mr. Bloss—who had never before been seen with half-a-crown at a time—was the most astonishing. Mr. Bloss lent Frank ten pounds! The wildest conjecture failed to obtain a clue to the possible origin of this windfall. Mr. Raffles, the medical student, procured the

loan of a gun and a fishing-rod, the latter not particularly useful at the time of year, but serving to increase the stock of baggage. The former was, providentially, a real Manton—a fresh shovelful of dust for the eyes of Mr. Charles Evershed.

Frank could not resist the temptation of the proffered help. His equipment was soon complete, and a dress rehearsal of the subscription beau was called at Mr. Long's apartments. Mr. Long had requested this as a particular favour, as a means of overawing his landlady with a sense of his aristocratic connections. The contributors all assembled to contemplate the effect of their joint production. Frank was turned about, criticised, corrected, complimented, envied, and pronounced all but perfect. The jolly fellows drank success to him in many bumpers, and accompanied him bodily to the Oxford coach, the box-seat of which our hero mounted amid their vociferous farewells—looking very like a gentleman indeed, but feeling uncomfortably like a swindler.

CHAPTER IV.

KEEPING A COW.

Mr. Charles Evershed was one of those negative middling personages of whom it is customary for friends to say—in the absence of more definite grounds for approval—that they mean well. Mr. Charles meant very well indeed. No man ever meant better. But this human life of ours is an obstinately hard-shelled nut, that refuses to be cracked by the mere velvet pressure of good intention. Mr. Charles was a young man of excellent disposition and of virtuous principles; that is to say, he was disposed to act justly, and was thoroughly convinced that probity was the best rule of life. But his virtue was of somewhat feeble and torpid constitution, requiring the stimulus of constant reward to keep it in life and activity. Mr. Charles was never so happy as when enabled to keep on good terms with his own conscience, which was tenderly sensitive, and apt to punish him sorely when he transgressed its dictates.

It would have delighted him at any time to be able to pursue a great and meritorious line of conduct, provided he were not much a loser by the transaction. On the other hand, the necessity of behaving falsely or ungenerously annoyed him dreadfully, but was nevertheless one to which he would yield on very slender provocation. He wanted very much to be a great and a good man. But he was quite ready to become a very great scoundrel, provided he couldn't help himself, and to make the best of that irksome situation.

This budding senator—some few months before we had the honour of making his acquaintance—had shaken hands with himself most heartily in congratulation of his noble conduct in waiving his claims to the hand of his wealthy and beautiful cousin. He had also felt very proud of the philosophical execration in which he held the character of his rascally father. But his honesty had only thriven so long as it promised to be the best policy. Like a true placeman, he had counted on "compensation" for the loss of his affianced bride, in the shape of another lady's hand, whose family interest he looked forward to as a stepping-stone to his political advancement. His father, he had calculated, would never trouble him again—that worthy patrician being exiled from his native land by something more than suspicion of a grave crime. But the Destinies had cruelly altered

Mr. Charles's agreeable programme. The cabinet minister had refused him his daughter's hand; and, what turned out to be Mr. Charles's presumption in aspiring to such an honour, had hopelessly checked his prospects of official promotion. His father had returned to clear himself in the public estimation from all taint of the offence with which he had been accused, and to resume his old habits of oppressive extortion, which had been the young man's bane and incubus through life. Mr. Charles regretted his hasty renunciation of Miss Bell and her eight thousand a-year. Was it too late to retrace his steps?

It had been a pet maxim of Sir Paul Evershed's, that it was the duty of every sensible man, as he playfully expressed it, to "keep a cow;" that is to say, to have some productive personage helplessly under your control for the supplying of your necessities. Sir Paul had kept many cows in his time. He had commenced with his elder brother, Bell's father, on the possession of some of whose dangerous secrets he had built the foundation of his villanous predatory career. Through this brother's influence he had pushed his son—whom he hated and despised for his resemblance to an ill-used mother—into a promising position, solely that he might prey upon him in his turn. Unfortunately, however, doctrines like Sir Paul Evershed's are contagious. Your human cows are apt to divine the policy of be-

coming milkers in their turn. Sir Paul had incautiously placed himself under the thumb of an implacable enemy. Our mysterious friend, Mr. Giovanni, not only milked him unmercifully, but even threatened him with the shambles. The Italian was actuated in his threats and extortions equally by the animal instincts of gratitude and revenge. He had been grievously wronged by Sir Paul Evershed, and, as he conceived, vitally succoured by the Cassidys. He wished to enrich the latter at the expense of the former. The relentless Giovanni clamoured for milk, and Sir Paul's only available cow at present was his son. Charles was ordered to renew his engagement with his cousin and marry her, under penalty of seeing the author of his days condemned and punished as a felon. It was a heart-breaking matter to Charles, but Sir Paul took it very quietly indeed.

He was very sorry, the baronet was, that the English Church laws of kindred and affinity prevented his marrying his own niece. He believed himself a much more attractive personage than his paper-faced son, and would have liked Brayle Manor as a possession hugely. But there was no help for it. Charles must marry his cousin; and the only real obstacle to that desirable consummation was the engagement with Mr. Frank Gerald.

It may be thought odd that the over-clever baronet never thought of Frank as an impostor, considering

the cloud of obscurity that hung over his family and origin. Frank's University degree had most likely saved him from this suspicion: he was certainly a gentleman. Moreover, as Sir Paul was bent upon wickedness and not justice, he only thought of good repute to be destroyed, never of possible deception to be detected. He busied himself only with damaging hints as to Frank Gerald's character—suggested only recklessness, dissipation, and probable unfaithfulness—all of which very properly attached Miss Bell Evershed more devotedly to her absent swain than ever. If Sir Paul Evershed had but known that Mr. Frank Gerald, B.A., was in reality not the son of Miles Cassidy the Irish carpenter, down in the town yonder!

Sir Paul, however, was busy with the Cassidy family from other considerations. He had learnt that his arch-enemy and oppressor, in whose power he was writhing, was their friend and lodger. Heartily desiring Mr. Giovanni's death or discomfiture, he had taken pains to possess himself of certain salient facts in connection with the household. He had employed as an agent one of Lady Harriett's servants, no other than the distinguished personage whom, not long ago, we saw overwhelmed by Sir Paul's cloak and insolence at Kensington. This fellow, a conceited and pedantic blockhead, had drawn up a report of his investigations, in attempted imitation of an official style,

strangely at variance with the truth, but with which Sir Paul was highly amused and perfectly satisfied.

The document is worthy of preservation. It ran as follows:

"Old Cassidy, Hirish carpenter, come to Hoxford on the tramp better than seventeen years ago. Uncommon low and ilitrate; spoke of as having saved money, but scaly in the extream. Set up in A—— two years back. Not generally liked. Ad two sons, one of wich turned out bad, and left his home in consequens of troubel; the other not much better, given to drink, but reported a good bowler at crickit. Young niece, apparently good-looking, but suspishus charickter. A gent frequenting the ouse from Hoxford College. Spoke ill of by the naybours in consequens. Widder woman by way of ousekeeper, of low origin and conexshuns. Have a son of hers residing on the premises, at present disabled by ingery from haxident, but aving been in County Jale for felony previous. Tall man off his head, proberbly one of the fambly—said to have been an idiot in Hoxford poorhouse—compleating the cattylog. Altogether a bad lot I should say."

"And this, my friend," asked Sir Paul with a smile, having perused the precious document, "is the result of your careful investigations?"

"Them 's the heads of the facts, Sir Paul," replied

the bowing flunkey. "You'll find 'em correct in every particklar. I've spared no pains, Sir Paul. I've bemeaned myself by drinking along with some of the wust charickters in the naybourhood, as is likely to know most about sich people. Beside, I've spoke to the widow woman, the housekeeper, myself. I can see *her* game. She's up to marrying the hold man, which it seems he takes to, keeping her son in the house in spite of previous bad charickter. A coarse lot, Sir Paul, depend upon it."

"That will do, my good fellow. Here is another guinea for you. You can leave the manuscript."

"Thank you, Sir Paul."

The scribe left the apartment in all the conscious pride of well-rewarded authorship.

"A serviceable and amusing rascal," said Sir Paul to himself. "My friend Giovanni appears to have cast his lot, fortunately, amongst a disreputable set. It will be hard, indeed, if we cannot prove something against him—amid such associations. At least we may be able to invalidate any disagreeable testimony he may feel inclined to bring forward. That jail-bird on the premises may prove serviceable. I must hunt him up."

Sir Paul hunted the jail-bird up, and was pleased to recognise in him the person of Mr. Samuel Quelch, slowly recovering from his accident, and taking the air on crutches. The congenial spirits fraternised

promptly. Sir Paul gave his former unsuccessful messenger some money, and questioned him. Mr. Quelch was badly off, he said, and very much ill-used by society in general, but chiefly by Miles Cassidy and his own mother. Mr. Pyebush also annoyed him, by possessing more health, money, and consideration, than he, Samuel, was judged by the unfeeling majority entitled to. Nor did he altogether like Mr. Giovanni, who occupied the most comfortable room in the house, while Samuel was fain to content himself with a cock-loft.

"I wouldn't stand it if I were you, my friend," said the baronet, pleasantly.

"Blest if I mean to, as soon as I can get rid of these here crutches, and cut and run," said Samuel, with much bitterness. "Why, that old Cassidy's rolling in money, and he won't put it in no bank. They say he keeps it all in a locker under soft Jimmy's bed——"

"My friend, if you contemplate anything burglarious pray keep it to yourself."

"Who said I did? None of your nonsense here! Be off!"

Mr. Quelch looked dreadfully alarmed. Sir Paul gracefully smiled away his apprehensions.

"Don't be frightened, my good fellow," said the baronet, showing all his teeth: "I was only joking. A lad of your pluck and talent must be wretched in

this helpless condition. What you want is a little easy, profitable work."

"Well, it must be easy—look at the state I'm in; and I should like it profitable."

"You spoke of the Italian man—your master's lodger?"

"Blow him, and my master as you call him! *They* don't want for nothink. Look at me!"

"I do so, intently. Nor need you want for anything if you can do me a trifling service."

"Well, make it trifling."

"Have you observed the man I speak of—the foreigner?"

"Blow him! rather! I see him come out every morning—after sich a breakfast as *I* can never get—and sit there on the steps, in the sun, like a lazy beast as he is, as if the town belonged to him."

"Never mind that. Has it ever occurred to you that he carries anything about him—say papers, for instance—that he is particularly careful of?"

"How the blazes should it?"

"My dear fellow, I gave you the credit of being an observant and clever lad—unjustly, perhaps, though I hope not. Do you ever see him put his hand suddenly to his breast, or to a particular pocket, as if he was anxious to assure himself that he had not lost something of importance?"

"No."

"Will you take the trouble to observe him during the next day or two? And by the way accept this guinea, as something towards the restoration of which you stand in need."

"You *are* a gentleman, sir. *I'll* watch him."

"Do; I may have a few more pieces about me by the time you have come to a satisfactory conclusion. And if you *should* discover that he carries any papers —say tied round his waist by a belt, or concealed in a secret pocket—perhaps I need only say that I should like to look at them, and that by the time you deliver them into my hands I may be very rich indeed."

"What sort of papers, sir, might one ask—just to guide a fellow?"

"One in particular, a long, narrow strip, with a stamp upon it. But bring me anything that may fall in your way. You are an intelligent fellow, I perceive. You know where I am to be found. Good morning."

Soon after this interview the local journals reported correctly, that Lady Harriett Brayle and Miss Evershed were entertaining a select but distinguished circle of visitors at Brayle Manor for the Christmas holidays. The wily baronet, his son, and some half-dozen remote family connections, composed the circle. It was a sad gathering enough. The health of the old lady was failing rapidly, and her irresolution was more

marked than ever. The baronet had somehow contrived to assert a strange influence over the household. Charles, reconciled to his father as to a stern necessity, strove also to reconcile matters with his conscience, by believing that he had been desperately in love with Bell from the beginning, and had never got himself really out of that sentimental condition; also that it was his duty to revile and supplant Mr. Frank Gerald, whom he strove to think of as a penniless adventurer. The Westminster Road episode favoured this theory. That memorable adventure Mr. Charles imparted to his father, who had served it up, *ad nauseam*, dressed in every conceivable sauce of pleasantry that malice could dictate. Old engagements—a dying father's wishes—family traditions and duties, were revived. Lady Harriett shook her head, and wept: she had possibly encouraged her darling grandchild in a romantic attachment that would prove disastrous. "Who was Mr. Gerald?" the distant relations inquired. "*Where* was Mr. Gerald?" was all that Bell asked. "Why did he not come?"

Sir Paul was in the highest spirits. His Italian leech had not drawn blood from him for more than a week. His son, reduced to absolute obedience, had acted the part of a despondent lover to perfection. Bell, vexed and irritated, perhaps by Frank's prevaricating excuses for non-appearance, seemed disposed to regard her cousin with unusual favour.

Sir Paul looked upon the marriage of his son and his niece as already accomplished, when, one morning, an Oxford vehicle drove up the lawn, from which descended Mr. Frank Gerald himself, resplendent in his borrowed plumes—gun, fishing-rod, whips, rings, and all—upon the whole, a very dazzling apparition.

CHAPTER V.

THE LION'S DEN.

AMONG the distinguished circle of visitors assembled at Brayle Manor, there were but two whom we consider worthy the honour of special introduction to our readers. The rest were the mere rank and file of genteel society—well-dressed supernumeraries, such as can be procured at a day's notice to fill any drawing-room. The exceptions signalised were a Miss Gertrude Brayle and a certain Mr. Sparrowbill, who, in spite of his eccentric and by no means high-sounding name, was a man of what is called good family, being first cousin to Lady Harriett Brayle. Miss Gertrude had stood in the same degree of relationship to that lady's deceased husband.

Place aux dames! Let us describe the lovely Gertrude first. She is soon disposed of, as there is not much of her, physically or morally. She was a tiny, fleshless morsel of old-maidenhood, who gave you a notion that she adhered to the obsolete weighty head-

gear, and voluminous petticoats of her youth, as a sensible precaution against the danger of being blown away. She was a very little old maid indeed. She had small intellects, small affections, small animosities, and a very small income. She was great in one respect alone—she was a Brayle! The proud consciousness of this important fact kept her alive and happy. What particular advantage there may be in being a Brayle, any more than a Stiggins or a Montmorency, may not be apparent on the surface. Whatever it was, it fully satisfied the humble exigencies of poor little Miss Gertrude. It reconciled her to herself, and saved her worlds of trouble. She knew nothing except the history of the Brayle family —as to which she was most likely deplorably wrong. She could not spell properly, but she could tell you that the Brayles had never been a writing family. She had not acquired a single graceful accomplishment—the Brayles had never gone in for amusement. She was not in the least degree ashamed of her poverty, or her necessity for frequently sponging on her relations. There was justifiable precedent in the case of Sir Simon de Brayle, her ancestor, who, being dreadfully hard up in the fourteenth century, had found himself under the disagreeable necessity of murdering his maternal aunt for the sake of her earrings. Had she not been so deplorably ugly, she might have lapsed from the paths of virtue in her

early youth, consoling herself with the example of some remote Brayle, who may have been a king's mistress. As it was, she was quite satisfied with ill-looks and reputable spinsterhood. There had been a great many old maids in the Brayle family—abbesses and otherwise. With regard to mere feature, the Brayle nose had been a pug from the time of the Conquest, and squinting was in the blood!

Mr. Sparrowbill was a mahogany-faced old bachelor, of angular development, with no particular chest, but with a large countenance, and an undue preponderance of hands and feet. He was, perhaps, the hardest-looking man ever seen. His face looked as if you might saw pieces off it, without in the least degree hurting him. By way of baffling all human theory of generalisation from external evidence, Nature had chosen to endow this grit, uncomfortable-looking personage, with one of the tenderest hearts in the world; but in compensation—perhaps in order to save appearances—had afflicted him with the worst memory conceivable. I say the worst, advisedly. Mr. Sparrowbill's was by no means a treacherous memory, but it had the one-sided faculty of remembering only disagreeable things. Thus, if you asked him if he were acquainted with Mr. So-and-so, he would answer you, "No; I haven't the pleasure: but I knew his father in 1804, when he was a bankrupt."

Or the colloquy might run in this wise:

"Mr. Sparrowbill, have you seen our old friend Such-a-one lately?"

"Not for years. Only once since his wife ran away with the footman. Sad business!"

Mr. Sparrowbill, on his arrival, had been introduced

to Sir Paul Evershed, with whose conversation he appeared much charmed.

"Looks devilish well," was Mr. Sparrowbill's comment. "A deuced deal younger than he did twenty years ago, when he got into that scrape about cheating at cards. 'Out of it?' Oh dear! yes. Shot the man who accused him, and was received in the best society after it. Most agreeable man! Glad he has quashed that infamous conspiracy about the bigamy. Never thought him guilty myself; but it certainly made a most unfavourable impression at the time. He 'll get on now, depend upon it."

Mr. Charles Evershed, on his arrival, was introduced to Mr. Sparrowbill.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Mr. Sparrowbill, heartily. "Not the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you, though. I was in the House on the night of your maiden speech on the chocolate duties question. Dreadful break-down it was, to be sure! Ha! ha! You can afford to be reminded of it now!"

Mr. Frank Gerald, on his arrival, was enthusiastically welcomed by Mr. Sparrowbill.

"Now, sir, I call this an honour—a positive honour," said Mr. Sparrowbill, treating Frank's arm like a pump-handle. "And that from an elderly man not given to enthusiasm, to a youngster like yourself, I conceive to be a high compliment. I am honoured,

sir, by making your personal acquaintance. I am no writer myself, but I am a great reader. I have read your *Anne Boleyn* through. The first canto—which is naturally the weakest in the book—I think I can repeat line for line. That pitch into it in the *Morning Scarifier* I consider the most unjustifiable production that ever was penned. I discontinued the paper in consequence."

"What a charming person Miss Gertrude is!" said a female nobody, one evening.

"Charming! I believe you," Mr. Sparrowbill assented. "But you should have known her thirty years ago, when she brought her action for breach of promise against young Goosebridge. Gained it triumphantly, and bought an annuity with the damages. Serve him right! Yes. She is a very charming person. Good breed, you know."

Such was Mr. Sparrowbill—whom having introduced, we will put aside for the present. We shall want him by-and-by for active service, on which emergency we may also find Miss Gertrude Brayle useful—possibly for the first time in her life, or after it.

Frank's arrival at the manor-house reconciled Bell to everything in existence, with the exception of her uncle and her cousin. The former she had always detested, consistently and logically, from a settled belief in his unworthiness. The latter she now despised for

his wavering and backsliding. As long as Frank's conduct had seemed doubtful, and while the enemy had possession of the field, Bell had temporised in a most deceptive semblance of humility. She had doubted the strength of her cause. But now her troubadour had returned from the wars, not remarkably victorious to be sure, but true to his colours at any rate, Bell made no effort to conceal her pride. She fairly paraded the blushing Frank before her assembled guests, as a treasure of which she had every right to be proud. She gave unfettered play to her considerable powers of sarcasm, turning the weapons lately employed by the baronet and his son most cruelly against their own bosoms. It was now their turn to writhe under cutting allusions to penniless schemers and fortune-hunters, by the skilful employment of which the relentless Bell succeeded in driving the elegant baronet to bite his filbert nails in corners, and in rendering the life of the ever-remorseful, and would-be-good-if-he-could Charles an intolerable burden and a torment to him.

To Frank, when they were alone, the scornful heiress was all gentleness, trust, and true love—ay! and good sense into the bargain. She pointed out to him the influence her uncle had acquired over the mind of Lady Harriett, and dwelt impressively on the dangerous badness of the man's character. She doubted her own resolution. Her grandmother's

failing health might leave her powerless to refuse compliance with any expressed wish of the old lady on a trying emergency. If she were once Frank's wedded wife, all indecision and uncertainty would be at an end. She was mistress of her hand and property. He had accepted both in prospective long ago. Why not ratify the bargain and claim possession at once? Secretly if he wished it, or publicly—only irrevocably. As for Frank's magnanimous scheme for making a great name and position for himself in the world, Bell argued very sensibly that they, of all living couples, had the least necessity to waste their youth and hopes in any such probation. To her, Frank was a great man already; that he would become one also to the world at large she was thoroughly convinced; but she would like the honour of helping him to greatness, and surely his progress would be none the less rapid for the possession of ample means and leisure for the pursuit of his favourite studies. Besides, she wanted some one to lean upon, to run to for help and shelter in her numerous trials. For, haughty and scornful as it was her pleasure to appear before the world, she confessed humbly before Frank, with her burning cheeks and thick curls nestling in his bosom, that she was one of the greatest cowards in the world.

It was a sore temptation to a runaway match.

"Do not think unworthily of me, Frank, for talk-

ing to you like this," said Bell, kneeling at his side, and looking into his eyes with an expression of sweet humility; and then, half-smiling, "You know I am one of the queens of the earth, and love exacts greater concessions from us than from others. You do not think me unwomanly, Frank?"

Unwomanly! The twining arms, the moistened eyes, the fawn-like timidity, and the childlike trustfulness, were answers to the question.

"I can only repeat one monotonous burden, Bell," said Frank, faintly. "You overwhelm me with love and happiness that I am unworthy of."

"I will believe you in anything else. That must be a falsehood, for my uncle Paul is so fond of repeating it."

Bell laughed merrily.

"Well, I am not unworthy of you, if, as they say, love can level all distinctions. But, can it? Consider once more the inequality of our social positions."

"They will be equal when the poor country squiress is elevated to the rank of the great author's lady!"

"Ah, Bell! But if the author never becomes great?"

"Then he must turn his pen into a spade, and sink contentedly into the useful country squire."

"But you do not even know anything of my family."

"This much." Bell took his face between her hands and kissed it. "A very good sample."

"But if you found that I were related to——"

"Forgers—bigamists—and libertines! Then we should be the more on an equality, and I should have less compunctions in disgracing you by such a family connection as Sir Paul Evershed."

She was a very clever little sophist, this Miss Bell, in her determination to overcome what she considered her lover's honourable reticence by proofs of the blindest confidence.

Their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted, and Mr. Gerald's long-promised confession again adjourned *sine die.*

Fortune had favoured Frank during the first few days of his sojourn at Brayle (this conversation took place on the fourth) by a succession of bad weather, which rendered out-of-door amusements impracticable. Moreover, there were some repairs going on at the back of the house, which would have made promenades in the most attractive part of the grounds impossible. So far, then, Frank had been spared all apprehension of a chance awkward encounter with any of his humble acquaintances or kinsfolk. His spirits rose with the sense of security. He distinguished himself in-doors immensely. The guests were delighted with the versatility of his accomplishments and conversation. Mr. Sparrowbill (who, fortunately, only knew him as Mr. Frank Gerald, the author)

could recollect nothing to his disparagement. Miss Gertrude pronounced him in limb, feature, and deportment, as actually displaying some points of resemblance to a Brayle!

On the fifth wet day the guests sat in a drawing-room, that looked upon a dreary expanse of leaden cloud and dripping shrubbery, amusing themselves as they best could. It was a very dull assemblage. Sir Paul had received disquieting news that morning, which had communicated its influence from himself to his son. He made a feint of reading, but his eyes were away from the page. He was in reality endeavouring to catch stray fragments of a conversation that was being carried on near him, in an undertone, by Miss Bell and her accepted lover. Lady Harriett, muffled in shawls, sat in an easy-chair on one side of the fire. Miss Gertrude on the other, employing herself as usual, doing nothing. Mr. Sparrowbill stood with his back to the fire, doubtless consoling himself with the recollection of some bygone wintry season, ten times more disagreeable than the present.

Sir Paul from time to time gave vent to an exclamation of impatient vexation.

"Don't seem to like your book, Sir Paul!" said Mr. Sparrowbill. "They are bores some of those authors. I can call to mind a few."

"On the contrary," said Sir Paul, showing his teeth unpleasantly. "I have got hold of a charming

moyen-âge story. A young secretary—what we should call a poor devil of a clerk in these days—makes love to a princess, captivates her at first, but gets exposed, and there's the very deuce to pay. Nicely written."

Frank was about to rise, angrily. Bell checked the movement by a firm, but silent pressure of the hand, as she said, in a perfectly calm voice:

"That is a favourite class of subject with the author you are reading. There is a story of modern life, in the same volume, I think, of an escaped convict introducing himself into a respectable household, on the strength of some secret power he possesses, and creating an immense quantity of mischief. He, too, gets baffled at last. I should like you to read that story, uncle."

It was now Sir Paul's turn to become red, and bite his lip with impotent rage.

Passages at arms like this between the uncle and niece were by no means of rare occurrence.

Mr. Sparrowbill, who doubtless recollected many bad family misunderstandings in his time, and their consequences, sought to change the conversation.

"Upon my soul, I believe it's going to clear up," he said, striding to the window. "By Jove, there's actually a speck of blue over yonder. The bricklayers are good judges, and I perceive they've got to work again. By the way, Lady Harriett, I'm glad to see you employ that worthy fellow, Cassidy from

Oxford. How that man has got on, to be sure! I recollect him when he hadn't a shoe to his foot. There he goes. Fine old boy for his time of life, still."

"Frank! what ails you?" Miss Bell almost screamed in alarm, seeing her lover deadly pale, and trembling from head to foot.

"Nothing—a passing faintness, merely," said Frank, turning his back to the window.

CHAPTER VI.

"SAVE ME FROM MY FRIENDS."

HUMAN nature—as has been observed once or twice before—is erring and sinful; but is also fortunately prone to the corrective exercise of penitence. It is an equally curious truth, that there is no class of offence which we are so apt to lament and strive to remedy as those we commit against ourselves. That headache in the morning makes us bitterly angry with our last night's dalliance with the other bottle. When Tomkins writes to us from a state-cabin of the "Red Jacket" steamer, on the eve of his departure for Australia, regretting his inability to meet that little bill, how furiously we reproach ourselves for having neglected the interests of wife and children for the sake of a mere fleeting and evanescent Tomkins! We meet Wilkinson hard up and ragged in the street—Wilkinson, who in the days of his prosperity had so often regaled us sumptuously. In a fit of ostentatious weakness we lend Wilkinson our

last half-crown. What a rage we are in with ourselves—even more than with Wilkinson—when we find that it is coming on to rain, and that we have not the means to charter a homeward cab!

Yes! of all errors we are in the habit of committing, there is none that is so quickly and inevitably fruitful of remorse as the sin of generosity. So it occurred to Messrs. Bloss and Long, Bohemian citizens in the republic of letters, that they had been, perhaps, somewhat hasty and inconsiderate in their expensive sacrifices on behalf of their casual acquaintance Frank Gerald. It was true that a kind of business-contract had been entered into. It was an understood thing that the expense of Frank's equipment was ultimately, though indefinitely, to result in the benefit of the investing parties. But Messrs. Bloss and Long—representatives of their community—were men of the slenderest means, not accustomed to business negotiations at a long date. They were habituated to small profits, and impatient of quick returns. Frank had been away from London more than a week, and had not yet issued cards for the wedding-breakfast which was to ratify his union with the Berkshire heiress, an event so anxiously looked forward to by his outfitters as a body. Mr. Long began to think that his available capital—that is to say, his boots—might have been more advantageously placed. He could not afford to wait. The mysterious

effort by which Mr. Bloss had succeeded in obtaining ten pounds—for what had been considered at the moment the common good—was a thing of which the repetition could not be dreamed of. There was no money anywhere! In the mean time Frank Gerald was enjoying himself at a country-seat in the shooting season, clearly throwing his friends over! Was this commonly just?

Messrs. Bloss and Long decided, in a secret and self-appointed committee, that it was nothing of the kind. Frank was registered as a "bad debt." Still the learned commissioners argued that it was their duty to save as much as possible, as the phrase goes, out of the fire. The logic they employed was very simple. "We are hard up. He is living on the fat of the land, at our expense. We are not sure that his matrimonial speculation will result in anything good. But at least he is on visiting terms with a good country family. Let us visit *him*. We are eminently gentlemanlike fellows and fascinating companions. Let us go to the neighbourhood and call upon him, as though by accident. An invitation to stop a week or two must be the result."

The resolution was carried *nem. con.*

Mr. Bloss had taken a degree at Oxford in his youth, and was popular with the stage-coachmen on the road from the metropolis to the University city. A crack whip, too, was Mr. Bloss, and every driver

felt it an honour to yield the ribbons to his amateur custody. There was no difficulty in securing seats, prevailing tightness in the money-market notwithstanding. Some further particulars of these two gentlemen may not be out of place here. Mr. Bloss was by profession a poet, that is to say, he lived (*passez le mot*) by the manufacture of sentimental ballads, into the composition of which the tender domestic elements of wife, children, mother, fireside, and so forth, entered more conspicuously than any other; the somewhat inconsistent fact that their author was a stout, dissipated bachelor, approaching the middle age, without ever having occupied a fixed residence of his own, being considered no detriment to such value as the lyrics intrinsically possessed. Mr. Long was a moderately successful dramatist. Being of a gloomy and saturnine temperament, he had devoted himself to the exercise of farce-writing, for which he had no remarkable vocation. His farces were occasionally accepted, sometimes even acted, and, on rare occasions, paid for. But in no case had the public been found to laugh at them with sufficient heartiness to satisfy the cravings of Mr. Long's exigent disposition. So that Long became malcontent and revolutionary. He was dissatisfied with the existing organisation of society. He pined for general subversion by means of armed resistance to authority—it was rumoured, for the sake of shooting theatrical

managers and intractable comedians from behind barricades. His appearance was peculiar, being very like an elongated spoiled copy of the portraits of Maximilien Robespierre, whose style of costume Mr. Long affected. Superficial critics suggested that this sartorial policy was adopted, not as Mr. Long himself declared, in public avowal of his political tenets, but as an economical excuse for the wearing of obsolete garments, easily obtainable by the most moderate capitalist. They were only partially right, those critics. Mr. Long—though not averse to moderation in his tailor's bill—was sincere in his expressed convictions. He dreamed of an Utopian Republic, under which there should be established, at the public expense, a theatre for the exclusive production of his dramas. The rights of man were to be defended by the erection of a guillotine, for the decapitation of unappreciating stage managers and incompetent performers. Hissing, on the part of the public, was to be punished by expatriation to a colonial settlement resembling the modern Cayenne, which has been so largely indebted to an Imperial playwright, doing theatrical business on a much larger scale, but in a spirit not altogether uncongenial to Mr. Long's, for its gratifying increase of population.

Such were the two gentlemen who left London by the Oxford stage, with the intention of giving their

friend, Mr. Frank Gerald, an agreeable surprise. It will soon be discovered that they succeeded in doing the surprise, if not absolutely the agreeable.

It is possible to have too much of every kind of good thing—even of those scarce commodities known as friends. Mr. Bloss, on the Oxford road, was not only known, but also trusted, both more than was good for him. His popularity in old college days had been so intense, that much of it survived. Present impecuniosity proved no obstacle to his obtaining unlimited refreshment at every halting-place. The result was that Mr. Bloss reached Oxford—Shall we say it? Yes, after all, there is nothing like a plain Saxon adjective; it saves so much circumlocution, as you will perceive in this instance. Mr. Bloss, then, reached Oxford—DRUNK! He had long been deposed from the box—the whip had been taken from his hands like the sceptre of an incompetent monarch. Mr. Bloss performed the last two stages of his journey in the ignominious condition of an inside passenger—incapable of taking care of himself. Nor was this the whole of the evil. Mr. Long was unfortunately drunk, too. That republican and communist, true to his principles, had done his best to share the perils and responsibilities of his friend's popularity, by absorbing to his own use as much of the various spirituous compounds offered to Mr. Bloss during their progress as the

latter gentleman would consent to part with; which was really very kind of Mr. Long.

The travellers reached Oxford by nightfall, which happened early at that wintry season. With that tremendous enthusiasm for active business which is characteristic of gentlemen in their condition, they refused all hospitable offers of food and repose, and insisted on going on to A—— immediately, really as if they were wanted there. The distance is not great. Mr. Bloss hired—or rather borrowed—a fly; and the two friends slept over the journey to the quiet market-town very comfortably. They were a little disappointed on being awakened by the driver—and resigned by him to such fate as might be in store for them—to find that Brayle Manor was some six miles distant, and that they would have to walk over the intermediate ground—a difficult achievement in their state. It was a trying situation. Funds were so nearly exhausted that a second fly (the travellers not being known in A——) was out of the question. Somewhat sobered by their dilemma, the two friends began to question their prospects of a favourable reception, even in the doubtful event of their reaching their destination. London was something unpleasantly like a hundred miles away, and there was no credit nearer than Oxford. Had not the expedition been somewhat hastily planned? It was to be feared so.

Under these harrowing circumstances, what course

does the reader suppose these great men decided upon adopting? The reader shall have three minutes to guess.

The three minutes have elapsed, and the reader has, of course, given it up. We must solve the problem for him.

Messrs. Bloss and Long decided—as they were always in the habit of deciding when under pressure of imminent difficulty requiring peculiar coolness and consideration—upon going into the nearest public-house and ordering something to drink.

They entered a clean-looking sanded parlour, tastefully ornamented with Windsor chairs and triangular spittoons, in which they saw a stranger sitting. At first they thought he was two strangers. But the stereoscopic principle being with some difficulty brought to bear upon him, he was discovered to be only one. This important preliminary ascertained, it took the spectators some time to ascertain what sort of a one he looked like. It is true that their minds were pre-occupied by matters of more pressing interest.

"What shall I bring you, gentlemen?" inquired a neat-handed waitress.

"I will take sixpennyworth of Irish whisky—hot," said Mr. Bloss, airily.

"I will take a shillingsworth of French brandy—cold," said Mr. Long, gloomily.

The refreshments demanded having been brought

in (their payment leaving the travellers in joint possession of something less than three shillings), our two friends proceeded to consume them, each according to his manner and temperament.

Mr. Bloss sipped his Irish whisky hot with a radiant countenance, as if nothing were the matter. Mr. Long gulped his French brandy cold, as if everything was wrong, and he was going to kick it right in ten minutes. Mr. Bloss was loquacious in his cups. Mr. Long was taciturn at all times.

"It is a poor heart that never rejoices," said Mr. Bloss, who was addicted to Tupperian philosophy, steaming his jolly face in the vapours of his toddy. "What though the night be stormy, the dawn may yet be golden,—I wouldn't mind if it would be only silver, with a little small change of copper, in the morning. No matter! The small-hand copy wisely remarks, that we may be good and happy without riches." ("May we?" growled Mr. Long, in sulky parenthesis.) "When things are at the worst they are proverbially on the point of mending. John, cheer up! And my best wishes to *you*, sir, who, in spite of your provincial aspect, appear as much in want of all that should make life cheerful as the most dejected dweller in great cities. Can I offer you anything, sir, that doesn't cost money, for I don't happen to have any?"

This was to their unknown companion, whose per-

sonality had by this time been fully made out as that of a handsome, plainly-dressed young man, who sat, with a flushed and angry countenance, gazing doggedly at an empty pipe and tankard on the table before him.

"I beg you will not offer me anything," answered the stranger, who, by the way, should be no stranger to *us*, for it was Ned Cassidy,—"especially impertinence, for I am really not in the humour to bear it.'

"Do you wish to quarrel, sir?" inquired Mr. Long, "firing up," in habitual advocacy of the Rights of Man, to take liberties with his neighbour.

"I have told you I don't. Pray let me alone. I am very miserable."

"He is very miserable!" apostrophised Mr. Bloss, with unctuous compassion. "John, he looks it. In that case he requires something that *does* cost money. Have a drain, sir. Do! It is obviously a fitting occasion. What isn't? As Solomon or Epictetus has tersely remarked, good news deserves a drain, and bad news wants it. Have one—which my friend and myself will sweeten with a double apology—on his part for having been rude and unreasonable—(don't rough up, John)—on mine, for simple mendacity. There are yet some latent coppers in the all-but-exhausted treasury. What is it going to be, sir—within reasonable limits?"

"If you would get me what I should like to take

most," said Ned, with a bitter, unsound laugh, "I should be very much obliged to you."

"Give it a name, sir."

"Prussic acid."

Mr. Bloss, accustomed to the "sells" of the metropolis, was not taken off his guard for a moment. He coolly rose and rung the bell.

"Do you keep prussic acid, my dear?" he inquired, gravely, of the little waitress.

"I don't know, sir," said the girl, in perfect simplicity. "I 'll ask missis, but I think not."

"So do I. Suppose we make it rum instead? Or I should recommend whisky myself. But this is fortunately a free country, and every man has a right to his own opinion."

"Whatever you please," Ned answered, carelessly.

"Mr. Edward," said the girl, "Mrs. Quelch has come over to ask when you are going home."

"Tell them—never—if I can help it."

"In that case," Mr. Bloss observed, "I should decidedly say whisky. It is a Scottish drink, and may inspire the sustaining principles of that singularly emigrant people. Whisky, my dear, for this gentleman, who is never going home. 'Aid one another,' —'Do as you would be done by,' are axioms of the highest morality. This gentleman is in the same boat as ourselves, John. He never intends to go home. Do we? At least, if we intend it, are we

ever likely to carry out our intention? Have we homes to go to? I am afraid not. My service to you again, sir."

"I am very sorry if I said anything to annoy you, sir," said Long, hazily divining that the man before him was under the influence of some grave mental suffering. "We are in a dreadful mess ourselves, and can sympathise with other people in trouble. If you feel offended with what I said, and think you could derive any satisfaction, or work off surplus steam, by pitching into me, I think our weights are about equal——"

Ned Cassidy started up from his seat, seized the tankard before him, and almost crushed it with his hand, in a spasmodic effort of self-restraint, as he said:

"Don't say that! For God's sake don't tempt me to fight! You mean kindly, but don't let me do it. I should smash you in a round. It isn't a question of weight. I am so desperate that no man of my ordinary match would have a chance against me. I never was so tempted to do somebody a mischief as to-night. Keep me from doing it, if you are good fellows, as you seem to be. You are in a scrape. What is it? Let me try and help you out of it, if I can, and forget my own. What is the matter?"

The two castaways looked at each other.

"John?"

"Bloss?"

"Our friend here expresses himself in the kindest manner. Do you think he could be of any assistance to us?"

"It depends——"

"If it depends upon money, I can't help you. I have only a few shillings. I have left plenty behind me, where I can't go back to ask for it. There! that 's all gone with other things, more precious still. What is your difficulty?"

"Why, it is really a delicate question," said Mr. Bloss, with much timidity. "The position of my friend and myself is wholly exceptional."

"Never happened before, I assure you," said Mr. Long.

"We received an invitation to an ancestral mansion in this neighbourhood, where we are most impatiently expected by an admiring circle of intimate friends. We miscalculated distance and expenses, and having had the misfortune to leave a portmanteau behind us at Oxford, containing our money, and being unacquainted with the postmaster of this town—you understand?"

"Perfectly. What is the place you want to go to?"

"It is called Brayle Manor, the seat of our esteemed friend Lady—ahem! you know the place, doubtless?"

"Very well. I have been working there; it is only a six-miles' walk. You could reach it long before they are in bed."

"Ahem! precisely. That would be no consideration. Of course we could knock them up; we should be welcome at any hour. The real difficulty is—I scarcely know how to express myself."

"What?"

"The walking. You see we are neither of us good pedestrians, and the fatigues of the journey——"

"Pshaw! the walk will sober you" (the two gentlemen looked very indignant at this callous interpretation of their dilemma). "*I* must be moving, for my part. You'd better do the same. I'll show you the way. I may as well walk in that direction on my way to the devil as any other. Are you coming?"

Ted had put on his hat.

The two Bohemians held a brief consultation.

"Shall we go with him, John?"

"Well, we must go somewhere," was the sagacious answer. "It's evident we can't stop here.

"What do you say?"

"I scarcely know. On reflection, as he says he has a few shillings in his pocket, and there must be some publics on the road, perhaps we couldn't do better."

"John, you ought to be a cabinet minister. Sir, we are at your service. Lead on."

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WAY TO BRAYLE MANOR.

HISTORIANS of the class I belong to—call us novelists, romancers, yarn-spinners, or by whatsoever humiliating name you will—have no more right to be choosers than beggars; whom, indeed, we resemble in many other curious respects. If I had my choice of faces to look at while I am writing this history, do you suppose I am a tasteless wretch enough to select, voluntarily, such facial objects of contemplation as the snake-cold, fox-cunning mask worn by Sir Paul Evershed; as the Newgate Calendar frontispiece of Mr. Samuel Quelch; as the immovable door-knocker, cast in rough semblance of human features, worn by Mr. Sparrowbill in lieu of a countenance — a knocker which it was no use knocking at at all, since it let nobody into the secret chambers of its proprietor's nature; as the empurpled, empimpled disc of Mr. Bloss's physiognomical system; or as the atrabilious visage of that harmless parody on all that

was dreadful and dangerous, the republican John Long? I should hope not, reader. I hope you will do me the credit to believe, that if I were not drifted along irresistibly by the current of my story, I should prefer to rest in contemplation of more agreeable sets of features. That is the truth. It pains me that I get so few glimpses of the noble, suffering—alas! too-quickly-wrinkling—face of my dear old friend, Miles Cassidy—a man I will maintain to be worth looking at (however feebly I may have sketched his portrait) even to the end of all these long chapters. I should like to see the honest, penitent, not too-clever, but always well-meaning, face of Cymon Pyebush a little oftener than I do. For Cymon is a good fellow; and I hoped to become much more intimate with him when I first made his acquaintance than my historical duties have permitted. I should like to call and leave my card more frequently than I am enabled to with kind old Lady Harriett Brayle, just to pay my respects, and see how she is getting on in her *décadence*. But I have so much to do, and I have no time! Thus we are obliged to neglect our most revered friends, all through the villany and looseness of a pack of worldly rascals pressing upon our attention!

But my trial of trials throughout this present pilgrimage has been, that I have been compelled to pass so frequently, without opportunity of staying to worship at, or even to deposit a garland upon, the shrine

of the true goddess of my idolatry—beautiful, large-browed, bright-souled, golden-haired, brown-eyed Biddy Cassidy. Messrs. Quelch, Giovanni, Bloss, Long, and Evershed (I put him last on purpose), will suffer for this, you may depend upon it. For I avow myself, frankly, of a vindictive disposition, and am unforgiving to those who put me to inconvenience.

I should have liked to have this beautiful creature more constantly before me, just as I should prefer to have roses and hollyhocks nodding against my window instead of the ugly steeples and chimney-pots that I see frowning upon me through the smoke-dimmed panes of my mid-London residence. But I cannot help myself. The ill-looking scoundrels occupy so much of my attention that I can scarcely enjoy a single game of play with my own pet children, of whom Biddy is the arch-favourite. I am bound to tell you briefly that, through all these latter days of trial, she has borne herself bravely—could she do otherwise?—that she has done her duty honestly and thoroughly by everybody. In her capacity of governess, she has turned poor pudding-headed Cymon Pyebush into a good Greek scholar—as deftly, and almost as rapidly, as she would turn a pound of flour and butter into good eatable pie-crust; and Cymon feels himself already prepared for the University bakehouse. He will get that degree and

the living after all—thanks to Biddy, and, in a minor respect, to Cymon! He adores her from the bottom of his capacious unopened heart. But he would rather die than say so (though he cannot conceal it, poor dog!—the fact is all over the town). He believes that Biddy is in love with her runaway cousin, Frank—the poet and man of genius.

Poor Cymon is wrong, as usual. Biddy is really, desperately, hopelessly in love with her cousin Edward—the carpenter and man of skittles!

But Biddy, gifted and sagacious as she may be, is, after all, only a woman, and may not take the initiative in love matters. They do not understand each other. Ted believes that Biddy hates and despises him. She simply reveres and is angry with him. She has built up an ideal Edward Cassidy in her mind. Why will he not reconcile his outward life to that ideal? Why will he refuse to attend to his father's wishes (considering how Biddy loves that father, and what a noble man that father is!), and yet be so careful in keeping up his cricket? Why so many business-duties neglected, and so many shooting-matches won on Port Meadow? Ted can explain it all to his pot-companions when the cricket and the shooting-matches are over. He would be a different man, he says, if his cousin Biddy had not thrown him over for the Honourable Cymon Pyebush, for whose blood Ted yearns.

Things have come to a crisis. Ted, always too malleable, has taken Mr. Giovanni's coarse, ill-considered advice, and offered Biddy the present of jewels supplied to him by that mysterious stranger. This was precisely the kind of attention Biddy is least disposed to accept. She has refused the jewels. She would vastly prefer a little reformation and stability on the part of the donor. Ted interprets the refusal wrongfully, attributing it to the influence of the detested Pyebush. They have had "a row," he and his cousin Biddy. Ted has left home with the intention of going to the devil, taking (in order to oblige his accidental acquaintances, Messrs. Bloss and Long) Brayle Manor by the way.

Meanwhile, Biddy remains at home hopelessly miserable, believing that she has determined to devote her life to attention on her ailing uncle Miles; (who, by the way, hates being attended on above all things: so that *that* would be a mistake, in the first place). Poor Biddy in reality has determined upon nothing of the kind, or of any other kind. She merely hopes! She wants to see Edward Cassidy the absurdly great man she believes he might be, and to marry him, or die for him, or at any rate to have a continuous excuse for loving and revering him. She is fiercely jealous of the cricket-ground, the race-course, and the river. It annoys her to ask of herself, "Am I so bad, that this clear-sighted, sensible, warm-hearted

man, prefers a dog-fight, a boat-race, or a rat-hunt to me?"

She thinks "No!" in answer. Then she gets in a rage with herself for loving a man who, from evidence, should be a fool. After that she is tortured by her strong masculine reason, which teaches her that Ned Cassidy, who has temporarily placed himself in the position of a blackguard, is certainly not a fool. Whose fault? Alas! my darling pet Biddy, you have too large a quantity of man's brains in that somewhat over-big female forehead of yours, to be a complete and secure woman. You put love out of the question: the fact is, your sex should never question at all. This skittle-playing Ted, whom you love so dreadfully (but strive to hide it), plays skittles from the same motive that makes you snub him so cruelly. You do not yet understand each other. There seems great want of an interfering angel. *You* are jealous of the skittles and the cricket-bats, Edward is as unreasonably jealous of one Cymon Pyebush; also a species of chattel whom you esteem, deservedly, just as Edward does the bats, stumps, guns, and nine-pins—because they are good things in their way, and minister to certain of his necessities.

I think, Biddy, you clever, golden-haired darling (whom I hope my wife will pardon me for being temporarily in love with), if you could only happen to meet Edward Cassidy at the right moment, and,

without saying a word to him, take his poor, fevered, wrong-going head between those nervous transparent hands of yours, and give him just one forgiving, encouraging kiss, that all would come right as by magic. But it is not your place, Biddy, to offer that kiss; and *you*, Edward, do not know how to ask for it, properly. Moreover, should the favour be begged and granted, there would be a premature end to the excellent narrative I am engaged upon. So that the speculation may as well be abandoned, and the sooner we get on with our story the better.

We are bound to Brayle Manor on foot, in company with Messrs. Adolphus Bloss, John Long, and Edward Cassidy—very dissolute companions, indeed, all three of them. But we will free ourselves from their society as soon as we can.

There is much congeniality of taste among the trio, as far as concerns a tendency to roll spontaneously into every roadside tavern that shows an open door; but remarkable incompatibility of temper between Messrs. Bloss and Long on the one side, and their "guide, philosopher, and friend," on the other, as to the rate of locomotion to be observed. Edward Cassidy is in a furious state of excitement; and it is a consequence of his healthy, muscular training, that he wishes to work this off by physical exertion and movement. As soon as they have got out of a public-house into the open road again, Edward insists upon

rapid walking. This does not agree with the constitution or tastes of his *protégés*. Mr. Bloss is of a full habit of body, and soon winded. Mr. Long is attenuated and indolent. Neither gentleman has been accustomed to pedestrian exercise; and the humiliating truth must be reiterated, that both are exceedingly drunk.

When the fourth refreshment station has been sighted, the two Londoners confess themselves dead beat. They can go no further. Ned Cassidy—albeit with tremendous contempt for the weakness of his companions—has no objection to the proposal that they should halt again and refresh.

They entered a queer, old-fashioned, gabled, roadside inn—aged two centuries at least—the parlour of which proved so fascinating that Mr. Bloss openly confessed that he should like to end the remainder of his days on the premises; at any rate, that he would like to stop there till the next morning. Mr. Long supported his friend's resolution. He had no hope, he said, on this or the other side of the grave; but he considered that the particular hostelry in which he then found himself would be as good a place to be miserable, or to die in, if necessary, as any other. So he declined moving any further.

The proposition suited Ned Cassidy's desperate, homeless humour. So the three fools proceeded to madden themselves completely.

I will not pain my readers or myself by attempting to reproduce the disjointed, purposeless conversation of three intelligent men, reduced to the level of brutes. They sat late—for village hours—and talked loud and long. An admiring audience of smock-frocked and gaitered Arcadians accumulated round them, and they forgot their several sorrows in noise and drink. What they said is of no earthly consequence. What my narrative compels me to record is, that in the middle of a perfectly stupid discussion, of which nobody, when he had ceased speaking, could remember the thread, a farming-man entering the room for a nocturnal pipe and chat, and happening to discern Ned through the tobacco-smoke, said, casually:

"Measter Cassidy, was you expecting your father's shay-cart?"

"No. What for?"

"'Cos I jist see it go by the door as I were a-cooming in. That be all."

"Which way?"

"Tow'rds the manor-house, I suppose. You be a-working there—bain't you?"

"Yes. But this time of night!—who was in it?"

"Why, Miss Biddy, your cousin, and the Oxford gent as she do give the lessons to — Mr. Pyebush."

Ted made one stride to the fireplace and seized the

poker. A dozen hands were immediately laid upon him, and a scuffle ensued.

"It bain't no use, Mr. Edward," said the farming-man who had spoken, feeling that he had committed a serious error; "you can't catch 'em. They be a mile away by this time."

"But I will catch them, if I do it by running," Ted exclaimed, after a furious oath, bursting from his captors and from the room. "Let nobody try to hold me!"

The Berkshire rustics, however, were too much of Ted's own temperament and education to be awed by mere threat of punishment. They followed him in a body out into the road, along which he was flying, poker in hand, like a madman—as, indeed, for the time being, he was. They soon caught him. The landlord of the inn—a gigantic, open-faced, middle-aged man, of the true Anglo-Saxon type—was the first to come up with the fugitive. He collared Ned Cassidy, and shook him as if he had been a refractory child.

"Now, what is the meaning of this danged nonsense?" the landlord inquired.

"Take your hands off me, Wilson, or I shall do you a mischief!" was Ted's answer. His frame was quivering all over as he spoke.

"Try it, you young fool!" the innkeeper answered, contemptuously. "Just think who you are a-talking

to. Why you know you couldn't even *hit* me, Ted. You couldn't if you were sober, and you're drunk now. Drop that poker, and tell me what's your game. Quietly now. Come, what's wrong?"

"You heard that fellow say——"

"As how he see'd your cousin riding in a shay-cart with Mr. Pyebush? Be that the mischief?"

"Quite enough, isn't it?" said Ned, with a heaving chest.

"Not as I see at present. I've a good mind to larrup you at once for starting off like that—making chaps think ill of your own cousin, a good, tidy wench as ever lived, when I'll bet a pound there's no harm done or meant. Come back to the house before I do you a mischief."

"I must follow them, Wilson."

"Then you'll do it in the morning, or as soon as you've licked me—which, I think, will take time. Anywise, I bain't a-going to let you run about the lanes with my poker in your hand, to knock out the first man's brains you meet with. There, hand it over, or you'll get such a hiding as will bring you to your senses. Come! on the quiet, you know."

Ted resigned the poker, and said, with helpless humility:

"I am very sorry, Wilson. I beg your pardon. I am quite sober now. Let me ask you, as a favour, to lend me your horse and gig."

"I'll see you hanged first," was Mr. Wilson's impressive answer.

"Why not?"

"Thank'ee, my lad—to commit a murder? Not if I know it; for that *is* your little game, friend Edward."

"So help me Heaven it is not," said Ned, quite coherently, and with sudden volubility. "You have quite brought me to my senses, Wilson. I know what I am about perfectly. If that girl has left home—on the wrong—it will simply kill my father, that is all about it. One—two—three—if we all leave him, the old man's heart goes off snap in a crack! Perhaps if I can overtake her, and speak to her, I may persuade her to return in time. Perhaps he doesn't know of her absence. For God's sake, lend me the gig, Wilson. They are gone to the Manor, no doubt. That fellow visits there, and I dare say has made his arrangements with the servants or keepers to hide her somewhere in the house or about the lodges for a day or two. Where else can they be going on this road? Come with me yourself, if you like. Thrash me as hard as you please, if you think I mean mischief. For God's sake, do, Wilson. Think of the old man alone there; not one of his three children in the house with him. I had just run away from him like a cur and a coward—never meaning to go back. But upon my soul,

Wilson, I swear I will go home again when I have seen this business out."

"There's reason in what he says," said Wilson, reflectively. "But I can't go with him. I can't leave the house. Besides, I must have a bit of sleep. I've got to be up early for the market."

"Then lend me the gig."

"Not by yourself."

"Then send somebody with me."

"That's better. Who'll go with him, lads?"

Mr. John Long, partially sobered by the exciting events of the last few seconds, thrust himself forward, and said, in a spirit becoming the occasion (for Long *was* a gentleman and a man of feeling, in spite of his bad farces and unsuccessful adaptation of the Robespierre "make up"), "I think you cannot do better than leave him in the hands of my friend and myself. We were on our way to Brayle Manor, and he was kind enough to offer to be our guide. If it proves he is mistaken in his suspicions, there will be all the better excuse for him. Nobody need know anything, except that he has borrowed your gig to drive us over to the manor-house. I am quite strong enough to prevent mischief, and there are two of us. Here is my card, if you want to know who I am."

"You seem the right sort, at any rate, sir," Mr. Wilson replied. "I honour a man that can get sober as quick as you seem to have done. As for the gig,

I'd trust Ned with it if he was as drunk as blazes; and I'll trust you with Ned, which is saying more. Thomas, put the mare in."

It did not take Thomas long to put the mare in. The gig was soon in readiness. Mr. Bloss, very hazy as to the aspect of mundane affairs in general, wished to sustain his reputation as a whip by driving. But it was discovered that Mr. Bloss was not in a condition to sustain anything, even his equilibrium. He had to be hoisted ignominiously into the vehicle. Ned Cassidy, perfectly calm and collected by this time, took the reins; Mr. Long, whose sobriety, it proved, had been merely of a fitful and evanescent character, keeping a drunkenly watchful eye upon him.

There were two roads from the wayside tavern to Brayle Manor, diverging at a distance of something like a mile from the former: one a short, uphill, private thoroughfare; the other a more roundabout, but less difficult turnpike.

It must also be recorded, as a misfortune to our three travellers, that Mr. Bloss, while the mare was being harnessed, had found himself unexpectedly in possession of a stray shilling or so. This sum he had invested in a purchase of his favourite whisky, a supply of which inflammatory liquid an obliging barmaid had inconsiderately put up for him in a bottle, for his consolation on the journey. Mr. Bloss was not

the man to keep that sort of consolation to himself. He shared it liberally with his fellow-travellers. The result was that the three, by the time they had reached the division of the roads, were much in the condition which had led to the formation of their acquaintance.

"We will drive over the hill," said Ned Cassidy, lashing Wilson's mare furiously. "It is the shortest way. That Pyebush can't drive. He is sure to take the turnpike. The mare understands what pace means, and the governor's cob is a perfect runt. We may get there before them. Come up, Bess! Hold on, you fellows; for I mean business, I can tell you."

"Don't break our necks, that's all," Mr. Bloss murmured, sleepily.

"I don't seem to care much whether I do or not. That's your look-out."

"Pleasant!" said Mr. Bloss, laughing.

"Like most things!" said Mr. Long, frowning—though it was too dark for anybody to witness that imposing process.

The mare proved herself worthy of her driver's eulogium, and dashed up the hill bravely. They reached Brayle Manor providentially without breaking any one's neck at all.

The house was all a-blaze with lights. They were keeping high festival that evening.

Ted drove up to the lawn, sprang out of the gig, which he resigned with its occupants, Messrs. Bloss and Long, to an uncertain fate, and rushed into the entrance-hall.

"I want my cousin Biddy," he said, glaring at an astonished circle of flunkeys. "Where is she?"

"You've been a-drinking, you have, Master Edward," said an old servant—no other than our early acquaintance, Joseph. "Better come up to my room. Lady Harriett would be dreadful annoyed, as there's company."

"Company! What company?"

"Well—a many ladies and gentlemen. Don't make a noise."

"Won't I, though? Is that Pyebush among them?"

"No, Mr. Pyebush ain't here to-night," said another man-servant—Sir Paul Evershed's confidential agent, in fact. "If he was, he wouldn't care about seeing you, I expect."

"That I'll be sworn he wouldn't. But I don't believe you. Stand by! I'll go and look."

Joseph and his accomplished junior, assisted by two or three others, held back the intruder. Messrs. Bloss and Long had by this time lumbered on to *terra firma*, and had followed their companion into the hall, gazing stupidly about them.

"Now you don't think we are a-going to let you up to the drawing-room, do you?" Joseph expostulated. "It ain't likely, you know."

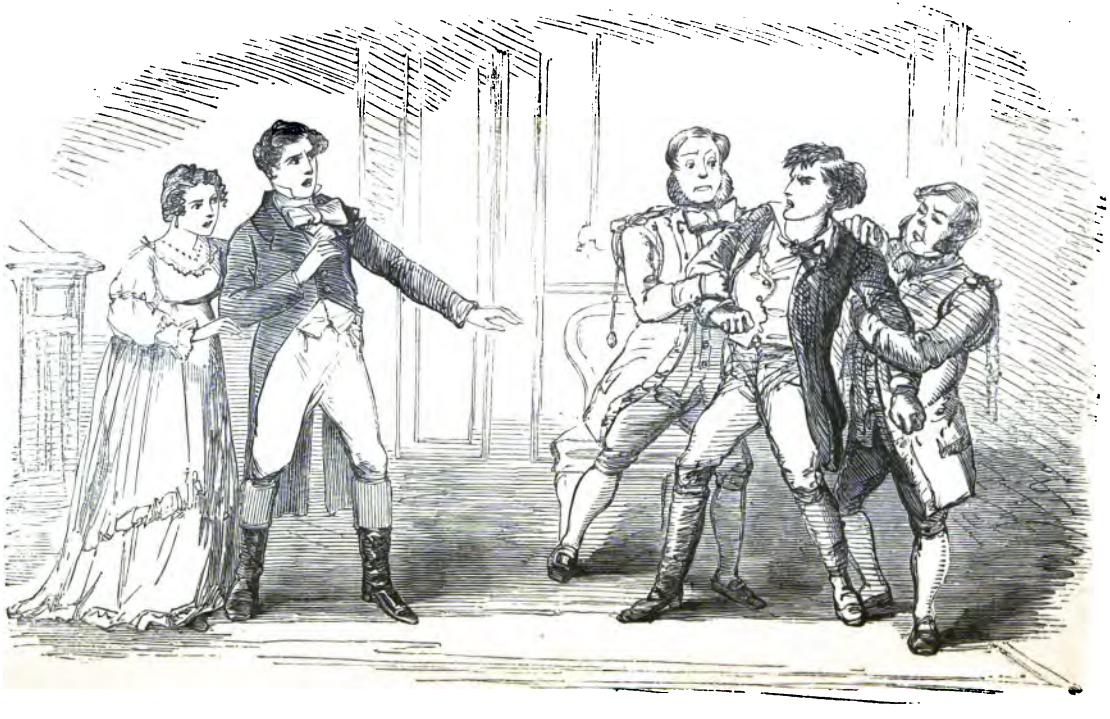
"It's likely there'll be three or four broken heads here if you interfere with me. I know my way."

"What's the row?" inquired Mr. Long, thickly. "No liberties with that gentleman. He's a friend of ours."

"And who the deuce are you?" inquired the footman, eyeing the new-comers with anything but respect. "What do you mean by this here conduct, Cassidy—bringing a pack of drunken chaps like this to the house?"

Mr. Long was past verbal argument. He attempted to avenge the insult offered to his dignity by a blow aimed at its author's head. The blow fell short of its destination, and Mr. Long measured his length on the oil-cloth. Mr. Bloss knelt over him, and wept.

A scene of dire confusion ensued. Ned, stamping and raving, struggled to free himself from the footmen, who, however, held him firmly. The tumult brought out many guests from the drawing-room. Foremost amongst them was a young lady hanging timorously on the arm of a young gentleman. At the sight of the latter Ned Cassidy drew back, passing his hand over his forehead, and exclaiming in tipsy astonishment,—



"*My brother Frank, by all that's wonderful!*"

"His brother! Ha! ha!" ejaculated a thin, disagreeable voice in the background. "This is absolutely too good. Our star is in the ascendant!"

Sir Paul Evershed rubbed his white hands together with intense delight.

"Is that drunken man your brother, Frank?" inquired Miss Bell Evershed of her lover.

"He is."

"I have seen him before. I know him. He is our carpenter's son. What am I to think of you, Frank?"

"I do not know."

"God help me!"

And now, having got the author of *Anne Boleyn and other Poems* into a scrape of some complication, I will conclude my chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

MURDER MOST FOUL.

"How extraordinary," said Sir Paul Evershed, wriggling himself forward snakewise between the astonished brothers, and looking from the face of one to the other—displaying his entire range of white teeth in a manner that was absolutely diabolical—"how extraordinary that I should never have observed the likeness before! Really a very strong resemblance! And so your real name is Cassidy?"

This cruel home-thrust left Frank powerless, except to answer with burning cheeks and downcast head:

"It is."

"D—— nonsense! It isn't," interposed a husky voice from the door-mat.

Mr. Long's abnormal position on the floor of the house had offered him peculiar facilities for recognising his own boots on the legs of Frank Cassidy—Gerald no longer. From the boots Mr. Long had

glanced upwards, and discovered that his friend stood in them. Being of a contradictory turn of mind generally—and when under vinous influence especially—he had made this discovery just in time to give a flat denial to what he believed to be a mis-statement.

"Nothing of the kind," Mr. Long pursued—rising with much difficulty, and failing deplorably in an attempt at jaunty self-possession. "Name's Frank Gerald; dear and particular friend of mine"—(Mr. Long actually pronounced the last words, "tickler frezomi," but ours makes no pretence to be a phonetic journal)—"Frank, my dear fellow, how do you do?"

Mr. Long extended his hand, which Frank shook mechanically, with a stare of almost idiotic vacancy. The unexpected apparition of his two Bohemian acquaintances was no light addition to the embarrassment of his situation.

"Are these men your friends?" Bell Evershed inquired, in a cold, deathlike voice.

To Frank's honour be it recorded, that, though he heartily wished his dear friends at the infernal regions, he scorned to deny or disparage them.

"They are," he replied; "friends to whom I am under great obligations. I cannot think what has brought them here. It is by no invitation of mine; but I presume they have come to visit me."

"In that case," Sir Paul Evershed remarked with

a chuckle, "I should suggest that the Messrs. Cassidy and their guests, since they have honoured Brayle Manor by making it their hotel, be provided with accommodation in the servants' hall."

"You shall answer me for this insolence, Sir Paul Evershed," said Frank, livid with anger, and losing all control over himself.

"Indeed! How?"

"With your life perhaps. You will hear from me in the morning."

"A challenge! Pray don't trouble yourself, my good friend, our weapons are unequal. Mine are those of gentlemen. I am unacquainted with the management of the adze or the chisel."

Sir Paul had scarcely uttered the words when he felt a strong man's hand closing like a vice about his neck. Edward Cassidy, from the moment of his unlucky recognition of his brother, had stood motionless in a kind of stupor. He felt that by his tipsy imprudence he had compromised, perhaps ruined, that brother for whose welfare he would have made any sacrifices. Hearing Frank insulted by a man whom he held in particular detestation, he had sprung instinctively forward and seized Sir Paul Evershed by the throat.

"Shall I throttle this slimy rascal, Frank?" he nquired, shaking the dainty frame of the scared baronet fiercely. "He deserves it at either of our

hands. Say the word, and I'll put him beyond further mischief."

"Let him go, in Heaven's name," said Frank.

The obedient Ned released his prisoner, whom he hurled from him contemptuously against the wall.

"I call upon you all to bear witness," the baronet said, in a quivering voice, pale with rage and terror as he spoke—"that this fellow has committed a murderous assault upon me, urged to it by his brother—his brother, do you hear?"

"His brother!" echoed Bell Evershed, in hollow despairing accents.

"You will find me at my father's house in the morning," said Frank, calmed and abashed, "to answer any charge in whatever manner you please. Miss Evershed, I perceive from your manner that this is no longer a place for me. Appearances are against me, but I have never represented myself to you as other than I really was. Brother Edward, your imprudence has ruined me: but no matter; the discovery must have been made. Let us return home together. I have been away from it too long. You, gentlemen," addressing Messrs. Bloss and Long, "if you will accompany me to my father's, I can insure you at least a hospitable reception, if a homely one. Miss Evershed, will you give me your hand at parting?"

Poor Bell! How cruelly her air-built castles had

been knocked about her ears! Her poet—her hero—her idol, after all, turned out to be the son of old Miles Cassidy, the Irish carpenter; a man she was in the habit of seeing daily clad in all the technical horrors of brown-paper cap and canvas-apron; the brother of this drunken young roysterer; the avowed friend of two of the most disreputable-looking nondescripts she had ever witnessed. And, alas! there was not a grain of romance to redeem the discovery. She could not but feel that she had been made the dupe of an ignoble conspiracy. She remembered Edward Cassidy's face well now—and his father's, whom she had sometimes condescended to glance at, while at work about the manor, with a sort of wondering reminiscence of having met him somewhere before, not caring particularly to inquire under what circumstances. She now remembered with painful vividness that scene of the riot at Kensington. The two vulgar, ill-bred men she had disliked so for being the cause of her idolised Frank's rough treatment at the hands of a ruffianly mob, were his own father and brother. They had met in her presence, and affected not to recognise one another! They had been too obviously in league. Oh, shame! shame! Poverty—failure—base extraction—desertion—cruelty—ridicule even, the most terrible of all—Bell felt she could have borne for his sake. But this paltry meanness, this sorry trickster's artifice, it was unpardonable.

How could she believe in the truth of a single word he had spoken to her, after this cruel discovery? Could she even give him credit for loving her? She turned sick at the thought that he had intrigued simply for her wealth. The whole fabric was destroyed. There was no longer a Frank Gerald in existence. A pitiful, shamefaced, detected impostor stood in his place.

There is no human experience so painful as the blow which destroys our faith in an ideal. The discovery of unworthiness in those we have loved and believed in, is worse than death. The death of the beloved one leaves at least the solace of memory; but in a case like poor Bell's, the past is all seared away as by a hot iron. All the pretty love scenes it had been so pleasant to dwell upon, had been whisked away in a second as by a demon's enchantment. The bower of bliss had been changed to a lake of fire; the roses had become burning coals; the doves were vultures pecking at Bell's heart; the cupids were grinning, mocking fiends.

And the worst of it all was, Bell could not repress the feeling that she loved him more than ever; that she would abase herself to any degradation, rather than endure the insupportable pain of losing him. How pride and love were tugging at her poor heart-strings, to be sure! Bell dared not speak; she felt she could only open her lips to tell him how she loved

him with all his faults. She dared not raise her eyes: they were welling with tears already. She feared that if she once trusted herself to touch his hand, she would be tempted to throw her arms about his neck, and implore him to take her with him, whithersoever he was going.

So Bell's white arm hung as a dead weight by her side, and Bell herself looked in Frank Cassidy's eyes like a cold, cruel statue. Had he but known what that rigid demeanour cost her to maintain!

"So much for woman's love!" thought Frank, bitterly. "Come, Ned, let us go home."

At this moment a vehicle drove up to the hall-door. . .

The crowded incidents, it should be stated, which have required so many pages to narrate, in reality had occupied but a very few minutes. The door had been left open, and the actors in the scene were still standing in the hall.

The vehicle was an ordinary spring-cart, from which Cymon Pyebush leaped with unusual alacrity, hastily assisting Biddy Cassidy to alight.

Forgetful of his usual deference to the sex (this, his favourite specimen of it, especially), Cymon strode impatiently into the hall, leaving Biddy to follow him.

"I want young Cassidy," said Cymon, whose manner was strangely excited. "Is he here?"

"Two of them," Sir Paul answered, with his sharp, self-satisfied laugh. "Which do you want?"

"Two! What do you mean? Oh! you are here, Ted. Come back with us immediately."

"Back with you——?"

"For heaven's sake, Edward, do," said Biddy; "your father is perhaps dying. There has been a robbery and murder committed in the house——"

Murder! A dreadful chill ran through the assembly. Every selfish passion, regret and animosity, was checked at the mention of the arch irreparable crime against humanity.

Biddy sank exhausted on to a hall chair, clasping her forehead with her hands.

"In heaven's name who has been murdered, Biddy?" Frank inquired, raising his long-lost cousin in his arms, and kissing her in glorious contempt of the presence of spectators—a proceeding which caused Miss Bell's eyes to flash fire. She would have wished to tear them out, could she have seen their uncontrollable expression of jealousy.

Biddy separated the tangled curls from off her forehead, and gazing into her cousin's face with a look of painful perplexity, inquired:

"Is that Frank?"

"It is. Do you not know me?"

"I scarcely know anything; but thank God you are come. It may save him."

"Whom?"

"Your father."

"Surely it is not he who has——"

"Been murdered? No! thank heaven. It may kill him though, unless the sight of you will restore him. I think it will."

"Who is this young person?" inquired Mr. Sparrowbill.

"My cousin and foster-sister, sir," replied Frank, "whom I have not seen for many months."

"Quite a delightful family-party, really!" sneered Sir Paul Evershed.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said Mr. Sparrowbill, sternly; and many surrounding flunkeys, in and out of livery, were awe-stricken at this daring reproof administered to a real baronet. "Don't you hear there is some grave business of life and death at stake? What is this dreadful affair, my dear?"

"They have robbed my uncle of all he possessed in the world, and a man has been killed in our house."

"One of the robbers?"

"We cannot tell."

"Who was the man?"

"A stranger, who has been lodging with us for some weeks—an Italian, named Giovanni."

Sir Paul Evershed fairly leaped into the air, uttering a yell of delight.

"What!" he screamed, "is that infernal rascal really dead?"

"He is—strangled!"

"Then I am a free man!" said the baronet, with a heaving chest and dilating eyes.

Looks of suspicion and disgust were immediately levelled at the incautious speaker from all sides. You see, Sir Paul was anything but a clever man, after all. He could not control his feelings. He was in the habit of thinking he could. This was because he had so few that ever caused him the slightest trouble.

He saw that he had committed himself awkwardly, and added, with a clumsy attempt at self-possession:

"I mean to say, that a very great villain has been removed beyond the power of doing any more harm. Of course, I ought not to exult in the death of a fellow-creature, called to his long account, and so forth. But I happen to know so much of that man's rascalities——No matter! The crime, of course, must be punished. How did it occur?"

Biddy explained the circumstances as lucidly as her agitation would permit her. It appeared that Miles Cassidy, mistrusting all bankers and investments, as is often the custom with illiterate people, had, contrary to all sage counsel, been in the habit of keeping large sums of money on his own premises, relying on strong locks and the canine fidelity of the watchful

Jimmy for their security. The treasure was kept under Jimmy's bed, in an inner-room communicating with what had been Miles Cassidy's own sleeping apartment; but which Miles had lately surrendered to his foreign lodger. It was supposed that the Italian's cupidity had been excited by the knowledge of so much wealth in his immediate vicinity (probably his motive for taking up his residence in the household had been portion of a preconcerted scheme), and that he had been detected in an attempt to rifle the strong box by Jimmy, who had strangled him. At any rate, Mr. Giovanni had been found dead that night from strangulation, by the idiot's bedside; Jimmy, in his night-clothes, staring stupidly at the body. The strong box was open and empty, suggesting the presence and escape of accomplices. A few gold pieces scattered about the room were indications of hasty flight, and possibly a struggle. This was one theory, which was, however, weakened by the demeanour of Jimmy (provisionally in custody), who, with unusual coherence, denied all knowledge of the transaction, except that he had been wakened from his sleep by the sound of money falling on the floor; and had found the foreigner asleep and very cold at the foot of his bed. He had called to his master, he declared, and was trying to wake the unfortunate man, when Miles and other witnesses entered his room. Jimmy had no conception of the

meaning of death, and his evidence was not to be shaken. He had found Mr. Giovanni, he persisted, asleep and very cold, and had been trying to wake him; but Mr. Giovanni would not wake.

Meanwhile, the loss of his treasure and the supposed treachery of his trusted friend and lodger had thrown Miles Cassidy—previously in a very feeble state of health—into what threatened to be a dangerous brain-fever. He was perfectly delirious; and raved about the desertion of his sons, for whom he had made such sacrifices. Biddy had resolved to go in search of one truant at least. Cymon Pyebush—who had been sitting in friendly converse with Miles and his niece at the time of the alarm being given—volunteered to ride in pursuit of Ted himself. Biddy, however, knowing her cousin's unfounded antipathy to that gentleman, and fearing a hostile meeting, had preferred trusting to her own influence. Ted's course was easily tracked. They soon learnt from the neighbouring tavern—where he had made the acquaintance of our two London travellers—that he had started *en route* for Brayle Manor. Leaving her uncle in the hands of efficient attendants, Biddy had put herself under the chivalrous protection of the faithful Cymon, and started in pursuit.

Ted's jealousy of Cymon was not particularly appeased by this explanation. Why was Biddy so fond of flying to that individual for advice and protection

on all trying occasions? Still, he felt heartily ashamed of the base construction he had put upon his cousin's flight with Cymon at the first crude rumour of it. Moreover, the tragic occurrences that had just been described were sufficient to silence all personal considerations. He expressed his impatience to return home, begging Frank to accompany him without delay.

They were about leaving the manor-house when a third vehicle drove up to the door. From this descended two individuals of the sterner sex—bullet-headed, closely-shaven, and redundant of great-coat and shawl. Mr. Twist, in fact, head-constable of A——, and a satellite unknown to fame.

Mr. Twist, chewing a flower of the season after the unexplained manner of his order in all ages and climates (why are the myrmidons of the law so fond of chewing flowers?—are we to suppose it symbolical of the law's tendency to crush out of all symmetry and to express all kinds of wholesome sap from whatever is fresh and beautiful in nature?), entered the hall placidly, took off his broad-brimmed hat, wiped his forehead with a bandana handkerchief, and glanced around him with an eagle eye, leaving his subordinate to keep the door and solace himself with the refreshment of sucking his walking-stick.

"Ladies and gents, my service to you," said Mr.

Twist, with great politeness. "Edward Cassidy, can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly. That's a bad business I've just heard of at the governor's, Twist."

"You're right. It *is* a bad business, and you're in custody. Put 'em on, Jim."

They were on in a second—almost before the astonished Ned had time to discover what they were. They proved to be handcuffs.

"What is the meaning of this, Twist?" Ned inquired indignantly.

"Like a look at the warrant?" said Mr. Twist, in tones of extreme friendliness. "Here she is. Mr. Norman's handwriting, you see; knocked him up for it as we come along. Robbery and murder the charge is—though I don't see as there's much case for the murder as yet."

"Surely you don't believe me capable of robbing my own father, Twist?"

"It ain't my business to believe or disbelieve—you ought to know that, Ned. My business was to take you, and I've done it. You made no opposition, I'm happy to say, and *that*'ll tell in your favour. Don't say anything to criminate yourself, mind."

"But I can prove that I have not been home all the afternoon."

"That's all right, then. You'll have an early opportunity of clearing yourself in the morning."

"But who can have brought this charge against me?"

"Me," replied Mr. Twist, with perfect coolness.

"You! Upon what grounds, Twist?"

"A variety of circumstances. You see here's a robbery committed and a man killed—perhaps while trying to commit the robbery, perhaps while trying to prevent it. We can't tell as yet. In one case it's justifiable homicide, in the other it's murder. Now in cases like this, it's my maxim that we can't have too many people in custody to begin with. We've got Jimmy, who is no great catch, to be sure; and we've got you. We shall have Master Sam Quelch by the heels before the morning, I'll lay a crown. And if a private individual's opinion will be of any comfort to you, I think Sam will be the only one of the three we shan't be in a hurry to part with. Still it *may* be you, you know, Ned. Don't say anything to criminate yourself, and you'll oblige me."

"A pretty little family connection you have escaped from, my fair cousin," Sir Paul Evershed hissed maliciously in Bell's burning ear.

Bell felt her consciousness fast deserting her. The lights and the figures swam round before her. But the scene had a fearful fascination for her, and she strove to see it to the end.

The old country constabulary were not such a helpless race of noodles and Dogberrys as it has been the amusing fashion to represent them. There were many astute fellows among the body. They were the days of rick-burning, of frame-breaking, of Manchester-

rioting—forty years ago; and then, even as now, with all our improved advantages of tickets-of-leave, chloroform—garottings, and joint-stock-forgery associations,—the machinery of crime was sufficiently extensive and complicated to enlist the energies of very able men in the work of its detection. Mr. Twist was born to be a constable, and his heart was in his work. Being sent for on the discovery of Mr. Giovanni's catastrophe, he had taken the bearings of the situation with surprising rapidity. His first impression had been the universal one, that the Italian had been strangled by Jimmy while attempting to commit the robbery. The unfortunate man had evidently been thrown on his back, pressed down probably by the assassin's knee, and throttled with his own neckcloth. On examining the body, however, Mr. Twist had discovered a stab in the side, not sufficient to cause death, from which the blood was slowly oozing. This had evidently been inflicted with a knife—and no such weapon was to be found in the room. There were, moreover, the marks of muddy feet on the floor, not corresponding with the dimensions of Jimmy's enormous nether extremities. The dead man's dress was also disordered, and his pockets had evidently been rifled. Ordering Jimmy into custody as a safe preliminary, Mr. Twist had taken brief counsel with himself, and come to the conclusion that either Ned Cassidy or Sam Quelch—or both in

complicity—had been the author or authors of the double crime. Sam was a scoundrel *pur et simple.* Ned was a scamp—had notoriously been "going the pace," had quarrelled with his father, and was in difficulties. Both were missing. In a very few minutes Mr. Twist contrived to ascertain that Ned, some hour or so before the discovery of the murder, had been drinking deeply and comporting himself in a generally excited manner at the neighbouring tavern, and had recklessly associated himself with two suspicious Londoners for a journey to Brayle Manor. Mr. Twist had put his horse in his gig, called at the nearest magistrate's for a warrant, tracked Ned's course at the different public-houses, and taken him into custody as we have seen.

"You don't mean to say, Twist, that you intend taking me to prison?" Ned inquired.

"Well, *that* won't hurt you, I expect. I have seen you there before now, after one or two sprees."

"But I swear I am innocent of this absurd charge."

"So *I* think. But I ain't a magistrate: am I? Hold up your hands, and let's make things pleasant."

"What are you going to do?"

"Search you, of course. What else?"

Ned submitted to the search with a tolerably good grace. There were no suspicious articles found upon

his person with one exception, namely, a richly jewelled necklace.

Mr. Twist inspected this article by the light of the hall lamp, with much interest, whistling slowly as he did so.

"That necklace is mine," said Sir Paul Evershed, eagerly.

"Sure of that, sir?" Mr. Twist inquired.

"I will swear to it. I was robbed of it some time back. I always suspected the man who has been killed of the theft. He was formerly my valet, I should tell you, and robbed me of several valuables. I am afraid this proves complicity."

"You're a-taking all this here in, Jim, arn't you?" Mr. Twist inquired of his henchman.

"Safe as houses," was the reply.

"That necklace was given me by the man you speak of," said Ned, growing alarmed at his position.

"Now, Ned, I wish you wouldn't be a thundering fool," expostulated Mr. Twist. "What do you go on saying things for? You know Jim and me is bound to take everything down. Keep it for the beaks."

"Mr. Twist," said a bustling footman, pushing through the crowd of wondering spectators in the hall, "Lady Harriett's compliments and she ain't able to leave her chair. Would you be kind enough to

bring your prisoner into her sitting-room for a moment?"

"Lady Harriett's a lady of the first water, as there's no disobeying," said Mr. Twist, gallantly. "Ned, you won't mind obliging her ladyship for a minute or two? Jim, keep close."

The footman led the way into the little oak-panelled sitting-room, associated in poor Frank's recollection with a very different scene to the present one. Lady Harriett, very pale, and trembling excessively, but with her kindly features forced into dignified composure, occupied her usual seat near the fire-place. Bell had flown to her grandmother's side, and sat on her familiar stool, her curls nestling in the old lady's lap, sobbing like a child. Miss Gertrude Brayle stood erect, with her hand resting on the back of her kinswoman's chair (which it had some difficulty in reaching, by the way), sniffing the air contemptuously, as if in reprobation of people whom she had once imagined to be little short of Brayles, but who turned out to be the mere kith and kin of such classes as carpenters, burglars, murderers, and the like. Mr. Sparrowbill stood in his favourite attitude, with his back to the fire, his mahogany countenance, as usual, expressing nothing whatever. And yet Mr. Sparrowbill was in great distress: his soft kernel of a heart was beating anxiously against its wooden shell—for Bell's sake, and for Frank's!

There was something queen-like in the presence of the benign old patrician lady, that imposed respect on all around her, and seemed to give her a sort of magisterial right to investigate the business in hand. Mr. Twist felt as though he had been called upon to give evidence and keep order in a superior court of justice to any he had yet practised in. He marshalled the various spectators into a sort of order, and planted himself erect, hat in hand, by the side of his prisoner, waiting for her ladyship to open the proceedings.

Lady Harriett first addressed Frank Cassidy in a low voice.

"You are this young man's brother it appears, sir?"

"I am, madam."

"You have deceived us cruelly, sir."

"Not intentionally, I swear."

"You strive to think so, naturally. I do not blame you. There were great temptations to the conduct you have pursued,"—she patted poor Bell's dishevelled head as she spoke; "but its consequences will be terrible to others than yourself."

"I fear so, indeed."

"That, however, is not the immediate question. This is no time to think of our own selfish grievances. Your brother is charged with a fearful crime."

"Of which I will stake my life he is innocent," said Frank, warmly.

"I could almost do the same," said Lady Harriett, "if my life were a more valuable stake than it is—judging from his honest face. But you have destroyed my faith in such tests, Frank. I would have staked my life on *your* truth and candour, and what do I find you?"

"A cheat and a swindler," put in Sir Paul Evershed; "a daw in borrowed plumes."

"Sir Paul Evershed," said the old lady, in tones of dignified rebuke, "the officer has granted a favour to my infirmity in permitting me to question him and his prisoner in this apartment. I thank you for reminding me that I was straying from the subject; but pray do not intrude upon our conversation again, as the officer's time is valuable."

"At your ladyship's service," said the gallant Twist.

"My principal motive in calling you in was to ask you—I am perfectly ignorant of the law in these matters—if you could take my security, and that of my relation Mr. Sparrowbill, for the young man's appearance, to save him from the shame of imprisonment in a felon's jail? I know the history of his father, whom I respect highly. I will also confess that I have selfish reasons for wishing to avoid any public scandal to his family. Can what I propose be effected?"

"Impossible, I suppose—eh, officer?" Mr. Sparrowbill inquired, anxiously.

Mr. Twist tried to smooth away the perplexity under which he was labouring, by vigorous application of the bandana to his forehead, as he replied:

"Why you see, my lady—and sir, to you, if it was my place even to settle such matters—which it ain't—this here ain't what we call a bailable offence."

"But have you any proof the offence was committed by your prisoner?"

"Not positive. But we've got a warrant on suspicion."

"But surely it is not the law to treat a man like a convicted felon on mere suspicion?"

"Ain't it?" said Mr. Twist, curtly.

"And have you discovered anything about him since his arrest to strengthen your suspicions?"

Mr. Twist was a literal man. He construed Lady Harriett's inquiry as having reference to the constabulary right of search. He immediately produced the necklace from his pocket, saying:

"Well, we discovered this about him, my lady, which do certainly strengthen things a little."

The necklace was a curious trinket of bygone and outlandish fabric. At the sight of it Lady Harriett sprung from the chair, from which she had not moved without assistance for many weeks, and seized it from the constable's hands.

"Where did you get this from?" she inquired eagerly from the prisoner.

"I have explained to the officer," Ned answered. "It was given me by the man they say is murdered, intended as a present to my cousin."

"Where did he get it? Who was he?"

"He had been my father's lodger for some time. He was an Italian. It appears he had been Sir Paul Evershed's valet. I was not aware of that. Sir Paul declares the necklace to be his property, stolen from him by the murdered man."

Lady Harriett glanced from the necklace to the portrait above the chimneypiece—the portrait that had so nearly caused Frank Gerald to betray himself at an early stage of this history; then, striding towards Sir Paul Evershed, and brandishing the necklace before his face, she said in fierce accents:

"You rascal! How came you by Jacintha's necklace?"

Sir Paul turned pale, shook, and cowered beneath the fiery glance of the excited old woman.

"Lady Harriett," he stammered, "really I am at a loss to understand——"

"You prevaricating cur, answer me! Did you murder her for it?"

"You forget yourself strangely, madam," Sir Paul answered, recovering his self-possession a little. "Insanity is the only possible excuse for such

behaviour. Your words are a perfect enigma to me. I missed among other valuables a necklace strongly resembling the one in your hand; and as the fellow in question had robbed me right and left, I may have jumped at the conclusion in supposing that necklace to be mine, finding it in the hands of his accomplice. My offer to swear to its identity was hastily made. By daylight, and with proper inspection, I should have certainly refused to do anything of the sort. Now I look at it carefully I am convinced, that though of a pattern very similar to my own, it is *not* the same one. In fact, I will swear that I never saw it before in my life."

"Or anything else, I'll be bound. Officer, step this way."

Mr. Twist obeyed orders.

"Compare this necklace with the one you see painted round the neck of that portrait."

Mr. Twist inspected the portrait in various lights with the air of a connoisseur, and contenting himself with the verdict of "uncommon like," returned to his place, pocketing the necklace.

"Take care of that necklace, officer," said Lady Harriett. "It may afford you further employment. The greatest villain in this room is not he who wears the handcuffs."

Sir Paul Evershed shrugged his shoulders and twiddled his moustaches with a scornful smile. But

the white hand quivered and the sensual lip blanched during the operation.

"Any further commands, my lady?" Mr. Twist inquired, anxious to remove his prisoner.

"None, officer, except refresh yourselves in the servants' hall, and take every care of your charge. I shall be at the court in the morning, ill as I am. Where is that pretty cousin I have heard so much of?"

"This is my cousin, Lady Harriett," said Frank, presenting the timid Biddy.

"Come here, my darling. Let me look at you, and kiss me. A rare beauty you are, now I see you. I have heard of you, my dear, as a brave, good girl, doing all manner of noble things for all kinds of people. Kiss her, Bell, for she is a true woman, and in sore trouble like the rest of us."

Proud Bell Evershed—always obedient to her grandmother—exchanged a sisterly kiss with beautiful Biddy Cassidy, and both young ladies felt very much the better for the operation.

"And who are these gentlemen?" Lady Harriett inquired, for the first time taking cognizance of the wondering, and it should be added wonderful, countenances of Messrs. John Long and Adolphus Bloss.

"They are two London friends of mine, Lady Harriett," Frank replied. "Gentlemen connected with literature."

"Then, if they are your guests, they are mine. Give me your hand, Frank, for the last time. I forgive you the past and the future. But understand that the dream is over, once and for ever. The wound can never be healed. We live in an artificial world, if you please; but the trammels that bind us are too strong to break. If you had been a poor gentleman's son, as I had supposed, Bell and her fortune might still have been yours. But the world is too much for us. I may despise its laws, but I dare not disobey them. The son of Miles Cassidy the carpenter can never marry——"

"A Brayle," put in Miss Gertrude, sententiously.

"I wish to heaven you had held your tongue, Gertrude," said the old lady, petulantly. "Why remind me by the sound of your voice of what ridiculous atoms the world is composed, to which I have confessed myself such a slave? There go, Frank. Good-bye, and heaven prosper you. In any case, your place to-night would be by your sick father's bedside. As to your friends here, if they will accept the hospitality of Brayle Manor, such as it is, for the night, they are heartily welcome to it."

"Really, madam, you overwhelm us," said Mr. Bloss, before whose mind's eye the most blissful visions of supper and choice potations were already floating in heaped confusion. "Your kindness is what my friend and myself——"

"Are unfortunately unable to avail ourselves of," interposed Mr. Long, with his most dignified bow.

"Don't be a fool, John," said Mr. Bloss in alarm, completely taken off his guard.

"Adolphus Bloss!" answered Mr. Long, severely, but with some lingering difficulty of articulation, folding his arms in the Robespierre manner, and darting a glance at his friend, intended to cut through him like the knife of a guillotine. "And are you the man—whom I have taken by the hand and treated as a brother—to desert a friend in trouble? If so, sir, we part. Cling to the flesh-pots of Egypt, if you will. *My* lot is cast with the captive, our guide and companion. Madam, I thank you, from the bottom of a grateful heart. But the individual who conducted us hither, is—is——" Mr. Long's eloquence began to fail him a little; "in point of fact, in a thundering scrape, and I feel it my duty to see him out of it."

"Bless the man!" said Lady Harriett, recovering for the first time a little of her old good-humoured vivacity. "Does he mean to break open the prison?"

"Who knows?" said Mr. Long, dreamily apostrophising the ceiling. "Bastilles have fallen ere now; and, armed with a good cause——"

"Fiddle! go and arm yourselves with a good supper, and a good bed. You look as if you wanted

both. Go and see if you can be of any service to your friend in the morning, if you like."

"Madam," said Mr. Long, with sudden alteration of manner, "your words are commands. It would be the blackest ingratitude in us to disobey them. Therefore you will be kind enough to stop where you are, Adolphus; or I'll know the reason why."

Messrs. Bloss and Long proved to be the only immediate gainers by the occurrences of this eventful night. They supped stupendously, and intoxicated themselves—for the fifth or sixth time that day—upon real claret. Meanwhile their guide, Ned Cassidy, lay shivering in a felon's dungeon; and their friend, Frank Gerald, sobbed through the night, saturating the pillow of his unconscious father with scalding tears.

CHAPTER IX.

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF MR. SPARROWBILL.

"WAS not Sir Charles Evershed—Sir Paul's late brother—a very estimable, charming person, Mr. Sparrowbill?"

"Oh, dear, no! A dreadfully bad lot, I assure you. Not a single redeeming point about him that I can remember. Gambled two or three estates away, ill-treated his wife, and ran away with I forget how many other people's. Very like his brother, Sir Paul; not so agreeable-mannered, though, by any means."

"It is astonishing how different propensities run in different families," said Miss Gertrude Brayle, sententiously. "Do you believe in all the dreadful things that they say against Sir Paul, Mr. Sparrowbill?"

"Well, I can't say I *don't*, my dear madam, if you ask me candidly. His extraordinary behaviour

to-night with reference to that necklace recalled to my recollection a great many circumstances which I will not say I had forgotten—for, thank God, I have an astonishingly fine memory for a man of my time of life—but which had, so to speak, lain dormant. And Sir Paul Evershed doesn't touch my hand again. In fact, though I am an old man of the world, and by no means demonstrative, habitually, I would not sleep under the same roof with him, if I did not think Lady Harriett wanted some one to protect and advise her."

This was portion of an after-supper conversation in the little wainscoted parlour of Brayle Manor, late on the night made memorable by the events recorded in our last three chapters. Lady Harriett and Bell had long since retired to rest, worn out and half broken-hearted. Sir Paul Evershed, feeling himself rather at a discount, and having many important calculations to make for the maintenance or recovery of his slippery vantage ground, had withdrawn to the solitude of his own apartment. His son Charles had been called suddenly to London on the previous morning. Messrs. Bloss and Long, succumbing to the fatigues of the day—not a little augmented by their super-human exertions at the supper-table—had been conveyed to their allotted chambers by a powerful escort.

Miss Gertrude Brayle, Mr. Sparrowbill, and two

or three more guests of the *quidnunc* species, sat in amicable discourse round the decaying fire. It was late, and growing chilly. But Mr. Sparrowbill was in unusual conversational force, and there was no escaping from the fascination of his Nestorian reminiscences.

"But how do you account for dear Lady Harriett's countenancing such a person—in fact, I may almost say, for her submitting so much to his influence?"

"In a variety of ways, madam. My cousin, with all her good sense and estimable qualities, is one of the weakest and most irresolute creatures in the world. I could remind her of a score of stupid, nay, positively culpable, things, I have known her be persuaded to do, in defiance of her own judgment. She is absurdly good-natured, and strives to think well of everybody. She tried to persuade herself that her son-in-law, Sir Charles, was the most estimable of men and the best of husbands to his dying day. Of course, she knew better in her heart of hearts; but you ladies are very clever at stifling your convictions in such cases. This Sir Paul is her grandchild's nearest relative, and I suppose she tries to make the best of him. Besides, Sir Paul is a capital hand at black-mail."

"Heavens! what does that mean, Mr. Sparrowbill?"

"In plain English, extortion by threat of disgraceful exposure, or some other disagreeable consequence. It has been Sir Paul's guiding plan of action through life. I remember his letting the cat out of the bag on the subject in a most unguarded manner."

"How was that, Mr. Sparrowbill?"

"Why, it was more than twenty years ago. I was comparatively a young man then—not young enough though to be justified in mixing with such company as I found myself in on the occasion I allude to. Late one night, I was persuaded into joining a gambling party of dissipated youngsters, a society of which it will be sufficient to say, that Sir Charles Evershed and his brother Paul were its most conspicuous and popular members. They—or rather we—drank and played deeply. Paul lost all his money and his temper. He was tipsy—a condition a rogue should never place himself in. He bullied his brother for a supply of funds to enable him to continue the game. Sir Charles—who was in a similar condition—refused, declaring he would stand his junior's fleecing no longer. Upon which the younger turned upon him with an insulting laugh, and said,—'How now, Damocles! Do you dare refuse to fill the treasury of Dionysius? Shell out at once, or, by Jove! I 'm drunk and desperate enough to cut the thread and let the

sword down in the presence of this worshipful company!'"

"What did the baronet do?"

"Shelled out, obediently to orders—pale as death, biting his lips, and cursing like ten thousand."

"Upon what grounds do you suppose Sir Paul to have acquired his influence over his brother?" a listener asked.

"How can I tell? Some infernal rascality between the pair of them, no doubt."

Mr. Sparrowbill had already partaken of his customary nightcap of brandy-punch, which it is to be feared he had mixed on the present occasion a little more stiffly than was his wont. Otherwise, some timely reflections on the laws relative to the defamation of character might have rendered him more guarded in his communications before so many witnesses.

"And do you really think, Mr. Sparrowbill," asked a certain gaunt Miss Bophus—who was the mere shadow of a shade, the parasite of an insect, the hanger-on and toady, in fact, of Miss Gertrude Brayle—"that Sir Paul can have acquired any similar influence over our revered Lady Harriett? Surely it is impossible!"

"I cannot agree with you. I have little doubt but that he has frightened her ladyship with the threatened exposure of something she considers a disgrace to the

family. He has a marvellous knack of getting people under his thumb. How else has he lived, I should like to know? He inherited his brother's title without a penny. All Sir Charles had to leave—namely, what his wife inherited on the death of her brother, Sir Lucius Brayle—that is to say, the unentailed portion of the Brayle property, was left by the baronet's will to his daughter, Bell. Sir Charles hated his brother Paul, no doubt with good cause, and would not leave him a penny. But it is believed, if Paul hadn't been obliged to keep out of the country—never to return, it was thought—at the time of Sir Charles's last illness, Paul would have forced his way into some tidy pickings. For Sir Charles was under his thumb as completely as man could be."

"How very dreadful," ejaculated Miss Gertrude, "if true!"

"True, madam! It is undeniable! Why, there's your cousin, Sir Cuthbert Brayle, who inherited the entailed part of the property, Sir Paul has some power over *him*. I can't say what. But I know he has compelled Cuthbert to do him one or two important services, and it couldn't have been from any love Cuthbert bears him."

"Surely, sir, you do not mean to insinuate that a Brayle could be capable of——"

"Can't say what the family capabilities may be, I

am sure, my dear madam. They are, no doubt, vast. I only know that Cuthbert came forward as Sir Paul's friend on one or two trying occasions, and at the same time that he hates him like the very d——. I beg your pardon."

"Poor Lucius!" sighed Miss Gertrude. "He was an irreparable loss! Had he lived, he would have revived the fallen glories of the house of Brayle."

"Excuse me for differing from you, Miss Gertrude. It is my private opinion, that if Sir Lucius Brayle hadn't been shot he would have lived to be hanged."

"Do you wish to insult me, Mr. Sparrowbill?"

"Not for worlds, my dear madam. I am merely looking at the probabilities."

"Then you insinuate that my lamented cousin, the son of my revered kinswoman, Lady Harriett, and the father of my idolised Bell—the last of the old Brayles, I may say—that he was——"

"As rank a rebel as ever was strung up without benefit of jury, my dear madam. It was notorious at the time. He was a close card, if you like—a remarkably clever young man, for whom I had the highest regard. Nothing positive came out against him till after his death. But that he was one of the arch-movers in the Irish Rebellion of '98, and one of

the chief promoters of the attempted French invasion on the north-west coast, there can be no manner of doubt whatever."

"How came it, then, that his estates were not confiscated?" inquired a placid old gentleman—a retired lawyer and former fellow-student of Mr. Sparrowbill, who with his wife (a stout elderly lady of most exemplary taciturnity), completed the list of our narrator's attentive audience.

"Why, I am afraid that was rather a shuffling business. Still, as it has resulted eventually in our dear Bell's benefit, I don't see any reason to complain of it. Sir Lucius, though a man of very old family——"

"A Brayle," put in Miss Gertrude.

"Precisely, as his name implies—owed the bulk of his property to a rich marriage, and also the exertions of his father, who had embarked in commerce."

"There are many precedents for it in the middle ages. Sir Thumpkin Brayle had the monopoly of ostrich feathers granted to him by James the First."

"Yes, I am aware. Well, Sir Lucius's considerable property was chiefly personal, the entailed estate being scarcely worth disputing. He reduced it in value a great deal, having embarked large sums in furtherance of the political cause he advocated. He

was a reading man—very Utopian—and greatly bitten by the ideas of the French Revolution. This by the way. As he died intestate and without heirs—(his young wife meeting with the lamentable end with which we are all familiar, within a few days of his own decease)—his property naturally descended to his sister, Lady Evershed, Bell's mother. Now Sir Charles Evershed, her husband, had made himself very useful by—there is no use mincing matters, and I am a plain-spoken man—doing dirty work for the Government in Ireland. He had many friends at Court, and it was judged advisable not to press for an attainder that would have deprived a useful servant of a rich inheritance. So the fiction that Sir Lucius had been shot in the streets of Wexford—during the siege, while in pursuit of his duties as a magistrate—was discreetly winked at. The fact is, he had mainly planned the outbreak himself, and was fighting like a tiger at the head of the insurgents when he met with his death. There were scores of witnesses to prove it."

"Why did they not come forward?" inquired Miss Bophus.

"Nobody asked them," was the laconic answer.

"You mentioned the lamentable death of Sir Lucius's young wife, Mr. Sparrowbill," said the ex-attorney's better-half, speaking for the first time. "I don't remember hearing of the lady."

"There she is," said Mr. Sparrowbill, nodding at the portrait above the mantelpiece.

"Unhappy Jacintha!" sighed Miss Gertrude, putting the corner of a handkerchief into her left eye. "Spare us the harrowing recital!"

"For pity's sake do, Mr. Sparrowbill!" said Miss Bophus, imitating the action of her patroness.

"I wasn't going to say a word about it," Mr. Sparrowbill protested.

"My wife would have liked to hear it, I am sure, Sparrowbill," said the old lawyer. "But if it would be too much for the feelings of these ladies——"

"No matter! I can bear it," said Miss Gertrude, resignedly. "I have thought of it night and day for years. It is ever present to me. Your telling it cannot bring its horrors more vividly before me."

"Proceed, Mr. Sparrowbill," assented Miss Bophus. "You can't make it worse than it is."

Mr. Sparrowbill flushed a little, and coughed as in resentment of these equivocal compliments to his powers of narration. But he had his talking garments on, and the least encouragement to proceed in the loquacious vein was acceptable. So he resumed cheerfully:

"Well, it was a most mysterious business, and rather a black-looking business in some aspects. Here we have Master Paul in the field again. He was Sir Lucius's secretary at that time—quite a young man, of course. Sir Lucius had engaged him at the request of his brother-in-law, Sir Charles—naturally anxious to serve the family. It is my private opinion that Master Paul would have turned some of his employer's political secrets to account, if Sir Lucius had lived; but his death made it our young friend's interest to keep them secret, as you will shortly perceive. However, this is only a matter of private opinion. Sir Lucius had only been married a few

months. Lady Brayle—original of the portrait there—was getting onwards in an interesting condition, just before the siege of Wexford. Sir Lucius, wishing to get her out of the country during the coming troubles, proposed that she should visit his mother in England—in this house in fact, and sent her off in charge of his faithful secretary. The country was all up in arms: the journey to Dublin was no easy one. They were delayed by want of conveyances and other obstacles for some days. In the mean while they heard of the disasters of Wexford, and of Sir Lucius's death. On this, according to Sir Paul—then Mr. Evershed—the lady became to all intents and purposes a mad woman, losing all control over herself whatever. He left her in such safe keeping as he could procure, in an out-of-the-way posting village on the road to Dublin, while he went to a neighbouring town in search of medical and other assistance. On his return, after several vexatious delays, he found the patient had disappeared, leaving no kind of message for him. After many inquiries, he found she had taken post in a north-westerly direction. Considering her flight to have been a mere freak of dangerous insanity (he says), and feeling the sacred responsibility of his charge, he spared no pains to track and follow her. He traced her by a tortuous route towards Mayo, and ascertained she had taken refuge in the house of

a peasant in a village near Killala. It happened, unfortunately, to be just the time of the French attempt at invasion of that part of Ireland. The whole neighbourhood was in a state of siege. Roads were all but impassable. Our worthy secretary only reached the village in time to find it a heap of smouldering ruins. A fearful engagement had been fought here, between the French and the insurgents on one side, and the Government troops on the other. He recognised the body of his employer's wife riddled through and through with musket-balls, among a heap of others. Her ladyship's identity was easily proved. Well-attested depositions were taken of the circumstances, and Sir Charles Evershed came into the property on behalf of his late wife, Sir Lucius's sister."

"Surely there is nothing derogatory to Sir Paul Evershed in his behaviour on that occasion?" said Miss Gertrude.

"On the contrary, it seems to me," added Miss Bophus, "quite a chivalrous kind of devotion, I may say."

"So everybody said," said Mr. Sparrowbill, dryly. "He made quite a good thing of it. Got complimented on all sides for his chivalrous devotion as you call it. Quite the hero, I assure you, for the time being. He even got a Government appointment through it. Didn't keep it, though."

"How was that?" the old lawyer asked.

"Had to bolt for some scrape or other. Great hand at bolting, Sir Paul Evershed!"

"But I suppose there was no doubt as to the truth of his statement of the lady's flight and manner of death, was there?" the old lawyer pursued.

"Oh, dear, no! quite the contrary. Plenty of evidence to support it. Rather a cheap article, by the way, just then—evidence!—especially in Ireland. It was all right, depend upon it."

"What could have been the poor lady's motive for flying from her protector?" inquired the lawyer's wife.

"Mad as a hatter, madam. Sir Paul swore it; and you surely wouldn't doubt a baronet's oath? Some very knowing ones put a different construction on it. They were of opinion that the lady had been intrusted by her husband with some political secrets that he did not care to impart to his faithful secretary—messages for the French commanders or the insurgent leaders in Mayo, probably—and that her orders were to escape from the society of her travelling companion as soon as she conveniently could, and proceed on her own account northward."

"Are you inclined to that opinion, Sparrowbill?"

"Not a bit of it."

"What, then, do you suspect?"

"Nothing. That is to say, a good many things

that I do not feel justified in explaining just yet. I have, however, put that and that together, and have come to something like a theory on the subject, which must bear keeping a little longer. My tongue has wagged a little more glibly than it ought to have done to-night. Ladies, may I venture to propose retirement? I can remember some deplorable cases of colds from sitting up in the winter without fires."

"Do you think it possible, Mr. Sparrowbill," asked Miss Gertrude, with difficulty repressing a gape, and nodding her chin in dangerous proximity to the flame of her chamber candle, which she had just taken in her hand, "that that fine young man is really guilty of the crime imputed to him?"

"I should think not, Miss Gertrude. I have spoken to the young man frequently. I am acquainted with much of the history of his family. I may say that I know a great deal about him. And I really cannot affirm that I remember a single circumstance against him."

An admission to this effect from Mr. Sparrowbill was like the proverbial commendation from Sir Hubert Stanley—praise, indeed!

"It appears to have been a very dreadful murder!" Miss Bophus yawned, with her eyes shut.

"Dreadful! oh, dear, no!" Mr. Sparrowbill answered contemptuously. "Nothing to some of the murders I can remember."

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE A MAGISTRATE.

On the following morning Edward Cassidy underwent a brief examination before the magistrate upon whose warrant he had been arrested. This gentleman was a remarkably fine specimen of the great unpaid—preserving the most characteristic traditions of his ancient and worshipful order. To the entire imbecility of the Shallows in the fifteenth he united much of the truculency of the Westerns in the eighteenth century. Fortunately his movements were greatly under the control of a tolerably sensible clerk, who actually knew something about the law.

But few witnesses were called; sufficient, however, to make out rather an ill-looking case against poor Ned. His excited behaviour in the tavern (which he was proved to have left and returned to frequently at about the time when the robbery and murder must have been committed), was sworn to by several witnesses. It seemed probable that, if not the actual

perpetrator of the crime, he had been waiting in a state of uneasiness for its accomplishment by others. His differences with his father, his humble embarrassments, were all proved, and were accepted as probable motives for the offence.

Messrs. Bloss and Long, who entered the court in a tremendous haste, a little too late for the opening of the proceedings, and somewhat flushed by the action of certain early restorative stimulants (taken medicinally, of course), but resplendent in borrowed shirts and collars, and big with enormous designs on the prisoner's behalf, turned out to be friends of that sort we are in the habit of praying to be saved from. Their joint purpose had been, in the first place, to prove an *alibi;* in the second, to prepossess the court in favour of the accused by the powerful recommendation of their friendship and patronage. They failed signally in both attempts. They had the haziest recollection of time and place, and it was easily proved by the people of the inn that they had made Ned's acquaintance only some ten minutes before the discovery of the murder; the accused having been drinking deeply alone in the parlour, where they had found him, at least half an hour previously. Mr. Long was also bound to swear to his recollection of Ned's infuriated behaviour, in the first place towards himself in the inn parlour, and subsequently at the roadside tavern. The exciting details of the drive over the

hill had to be described, up to the arrival at the door of Brayle Manor. At this point Mr. Long confessed he had succumbed to the fatigues of the day, and his reminiscences of what happened afterwards were somewhat confused.

"I suppose you mean to say you were drunk?" the magistrate inquired, snappishly.

"Really, sir," said Long, in injured tones, "such a question from one gentleman to another——"

"Gentleman, sirrah! what do you mean by that? How dare you put yourself on the same level with me?"

"I should be very sorry to," answered the excitable John, drawing himself up much in the semblance of a gigantic Dorking fowl challenged to battle.

"Hold your tongue, fellow, or I'll commit you for contempt. What are you?"

"A gentleman and a man of letters."

"Man of letters? What's that?"

"In the absence of your worship's dictionary I shall be happy to enlighten you," John answered, with ill-placed sarcasm. "It means a professional author."

"Author—what of?"

"I chiefly devote myself to the drama."

"What do you mean—stage plays?"

"If you prefer that definition."

"And the other, what does he do?"

"My friend is a lyric poet of some celebrity. His

name is most likely familiar to every person in court, with the exception of your worship."

"Exception of me! What do you mean by *that?*"

"I presume your worship's magisterial duties are so absorbing as to leave you little time for reading."

An ill-suppressed titter ran through the court. Mr. Long was inexpressibly delighted. He had met with an appreciative audience at last.

"I shall commit you both to prison," said the furious magistrate, "as rogues and vagabonds, as I am empowered by the act of —— what's its name?"

The magistrate's clerk put a sheet of paper before his face, and whispered a few words to his superior.

"Eh—can't we?" said the latter audibly, and looking a little confused. "No matter. Prisoners —I mean, you two men—you are warned to be careful, or I shall not extend this leniency a second time. What business have you in this neighbourhood?"

"We came down," said Mr. Long, "on a visit to our esteemed friend, Lady Harriett Brayle, of Brayle Manor;" then, catching a glimpse of the faces of Mr. Sparrowbill and Frank Cassidy frowning severely upon him, he added, "that is to say,

to visit a particular friend of ours, her ladyship's guest."

"Don't think to overawe me with great names, man," said the justice. (He was a neighbour of Lady Harriett's, whom he hated cordially, having been at litigation with her ladyship for some years about the right of way through a certain plantation.) "I am here to administer justice alike to the rich and the poor. Will Lady Harriett Brayle answer for your respectability?"

The clerk whispered to his superior a second time.

"No grounds, eh?" the worthy magistrate was overheard to say, adding aloud with tremendous severity, "Witness, it is my duty to warn you that you are placing yourself in a dangerous position. A fearful and mysterious crime has been committed, which it is my duty to sift to the bottom. Your attempt to defend the prisoner is at least suspicious. I am not sure that I ought not to order you and your companion into custody as accomplices, unless you can give a better account of yourselves."

Frank Cassidy rose from his seat uneasily, and said, with crimson cheeks and a trembling voice:

"Will your worship permit me a few words? I know these two gentlemen, perfectly. They are friends of mine, both men of good standing and reputation."

"Indeed! and pray who are you, sir?"

"I am—the friend they came to visit."

"What is your name?"

"Frank Gerald Cassidy."

"Cassidy! that's the prisoner's name!"

"I am his brother," said Frank, his head drooping as he spoke.

"Upon my soul, this is the coolest proceeding I ever heard of in my life. I suppose you'll all be surety for one another. Is Lady Harriett Brayle accustomed to choose her friends from the class of carpenters and murd—— I mean, people accused of this description of thing?"

"Will your worship permit me a word?" said Mr. Sparrowbill, rising.

"I don't know—who are *you?* The prisoner's uncle, I suppose."

(Much laughter from the court officials.)

"Your worship ought to remember me; I remember your worship, perfectly—many years ago."

His worship blushed—a proceeding he was unaccustomed to. It is probable that he knew Mr. Sparrowbill's terrible memory was at work to his disadvantage in its favourite channels. At any rate he bowed apologetically, and said:

"Mr. Sparrowbill, to be sure! I beg your pardon, sir. What do you wish to say?"

"Merely that this young gentleman, though the

son of a carpenter as you say, and the brother of the accused, *is* a friend of Lady Harriett Brayle's, and of mine. He is a graduate of St. Ogive's College, Oxford, and a writer of great celebrity; any recommendation of his I shall be most happy to back."

"In that case you can stand down, sir," the magistrate said to Mr. Long in some confusion. "Call the next witness."

Sir Paul Evershed stepped into the box.

The worthy magistrate was at first disposed to treat the new witness cavalierly, in spite of his title. A baronet in the abstract he would have fawned on slavishly; but this particular specimen of the order he knew to be not only landless and comparatively penniless, but furthermore, a connection by marriage of his enemy Lady Harriett. As it soon proved, however, that Sir Paul was decidedly biassed against the prisoner, the worthy magistrate speedily came round and treated the new witness with extreme civility and consideration.

Sir Paul proved himself too much for the magistrate and his clerk. He artfully contrived to stave off the main point of the evidence required of him, namely, the behaviour of Edward Cassidy on his arrival at Brayle Manor on the preceding night, and managed in the mean time to heap up a quantity of preliminary matters to the disparagement of the Cassidy family. The doubtful origin of old Miles;

the equivocal position of his sons, brought up on a sort of neutral ground between gentility and labour; the questionable relations between Biddy and Cymon Pyebush; Frank's introduction of himself to Brayle Manor under false pretences; the circumstances of his outfit by the London Bohemians (these the baronet had easily pumped out of the unsuspecting Bloss and Long, after their third bottle of claret on the previous night); the family intimacy with the deceased, Sir Paul's late valet, discharged, as the baronet could easily prove, for dishonest practices; all these matters Sir Paul managed to weave in with his deposition, which, while implying all, but positively declaring nothing, left the audience under the impression that the Cassidy family, and all their immediate belongings, were little better than a leagued band of rogues, thieves, and assassins. Sir Paul concluded by a vivid recital of Edward's murderous and unprovoked assault upon himself in the entrance-hall of Brayle Manor, mentioned the discovery of the necklace, and urged his own mistake as to its being his own lost property as a proof of the state of agitation into which he had been thrown by the prisoner's violence.

Mr. Twist corroborated the discovery of the necklace, repeating Sir Paul Evershed's expressions on the occasion *verbatim*, and Edward's unsolicited avowal of the manner in which he had become possessed of it. James, his satellite, followed on the same side.

Lady Harriett had miscalculated her own physical resources. She had not been able to attend the examination.

Another important witness was wanting; namely, Miles Cassidy, who was not in a fit state to be moved from his bed.

Jimmy was examined as a witness, grounds for his detention as a criminal being pronounced untenable. Jimmy disgusted the court by his contemptuous denial of all knowledge of the nature of an oath; but also astonished everybody by his rigid adherence to his statement of the preceding evening, as to the manner of his discovering the Italian's death.

The Honourable Cymon Pyebush and Biddy also proved the discovery. They had been sitting with Miles, when they had been alarmed by a cry from Jimmy in the bedroom. They had gone up, and found the idiot staring at the murdered man's body, in the manner already described.

The opinion gained ground among the audience that poor Mr. Giovanni had met his death in attempting to prevent and not to commit the robbery.

The magistrate—or rather his clerk—considered there were sufficient grounds for remanding the prisoner until an inquest should have been held on the body. Mr. Sparrowbill, on the part of Lady Harriett and himself, offered bail for Ned's appearance. The

magistrate refused it, and the accused was removed to his former quarters.

In the mean time, no tidings had been heard of Mr. Samuel Quelch. Mr. Twist grew despondent of his reputation.

CHAPTER XI.

CLEARING UP.

An inquest was held on the body of the unfortunate Italian next day. The jury returned an open verdict. There was still a possibility that the deceased had been killed by Jimmy, who, terrified at his own act, had persisted with an idiot's cunning in denying it.

Some circumstances elicited at the inquest served to change the aspect of things considerably in Ned's favour. In order to explain these, it will be necessary to retrace our steps a little. On the day of the robbery Miles Cassidy had left home on a business journey, from which he was not expected to return till the following. His friend, Mr. Giovanni, had accompanied him for the sake of change of air and esteemed society. Ned's quarrel with his cousin had taken place at middle-day: the young man had left his home with the threat never to return to it. It was a holiday season, and there were no men at work on the premises, which were comparatively unpro-

tected, except by Jimmy. The only other male inmate of the place was Sam Quelch, to all appearance a helpless cripple from the lingering effects of his accident. Sam had complained bitterly that day of fever and debility. He had been seen in the morning dragging himself along by the aid of his crutches, apparently with great difficulty. He had called at the house of the town surgeon, for whom he had left a respectful message, to the effect that his leg was getting bad again, that he could eat nothing, and would be obliged if the gentleman could send him some more medicine. After this he had proceeded to the overseer of the parish poorhouse, and represented his case very dolefully. He expressed his inability to work, and begged hard to be taken into the house till such time as he should recover, mentioning that he could not remain a burden on Mr. Cassidy any longer; that Mr. Cassidy, though a well-meaning man, was very "near," and complained of the hardness of the times; that he was afraid of depriving his mother of a home, &c. &c.; all of which representations the overseer stated Mr. Quelch had made with most praiseworthy display of feeling. Sam had hobbled home early, and expressed his desire to go to bed before his usual hour, requesting his mother to send him up a basin of gruel by Jimmy as soon as he had got into bed. It was one of Cymon Pyebush's evenings of study, and the widow was on duty in her

capacity of duenna. On these occasions she made a point never to quit her post. She had prepared the gruel in the sitting-room, and sent it up by Jimmy as directed. This recapitulation brings us to about eight o'clock in the evening, some three hours before the discovery of the murder.

Sam Quelch's apartment was away from the house, in a loft attached to the workshop on the right-hand side of the court-yard already described. It was necessary to cross this court-yard to reach Sam's bedroom. Biddy remembered afterwards, as a curious thing, that Jimmy was a long time away on his errand with the gruel, and that his behaviour on returning was singular and unusual. It had been his unvarying custom (in obedience to standing orders) to ask permission to retire to rest. On this occasion he walked straight past the sitting-room door and proceeded up-stairs—stumbling frequently in the course of the ascent. He was heard to slam the bedroom-door violently, and soon afterwards a heavy fall was heard in his room. As this room was a considerable distance off—being at the end of the left wing, or dwelling part of the premises nearest the river, while the sitting-room was at the extremity nearest the street—it could have been no slight disturbance to attract attention from the latter apartment. Biddy and the widow Quelch were alarmed. Cymon Pyebush volunteered to go and see what was the

matter. He took a candle and went up-stairs. He soon returned laughing, saying that he had found Jimmy (who was never allowed the custody of a light) picking himself from off the floor, and rubbing certain contusions with a very foggy expression of countenance. On being asked what had happened, the idiot had merely said "fell down," and rolled in a heap on his bed half-dressed, falling dead asleep immediately. It was Cymon's expressed opinion that some mistakenly good-natured person had been giving Jimmy something to drink. Biddy remarked, that if such had been the case it was fortunate her uncle was not at home, as he would have been very angry. And there the matter ended.

At a little before nine, Cymon's lesson being finished, he was about to depart for his own lodgings, when Miles Cassidy and his friend Mr. Giovanni unexpectedly made their appearance. They had been by coach to a town some miles beyond Oxford, where Miles was executing a contract—intending, as already stated, to remain from home till the following day. But they had been caught in a shower of rain, and the susceptible foreigner had been threatened with an attack of ague—an evil which, among countless others, his withered flesh was heir to. The obsequious Miles, in obedience to his friend's request, had returned home.

Miles came in angrily, demanding why Jimmy had not shut the front gates.

Biddy invented the readiest excuse she could think of. Jimmy had gone to bed very unwell, she said, and the widow was just going to fasten them, and let Mr. Pyebush out.

"Bedad! and we'd betther set up hospital at wanst," said Miles, with rather dismal jocularity. "There's none of us much to boast of here—eh, Misther Pyebush and Misther Jivarney?"

Poor Mr. Jivarney's shivering fit had come on him. He was not in a frame of mind for conversation. He asked for his bedroom candle, and, refusing all offers of refreshment, bade everybody good night and withdrew to his sleeping apartment, never to be seen alive again by any there present.

Not a word had been said to Miles about Ned's ill-humoured departure: though the young man had been in such a chronic state of loggerheads with his family for the last few days, that the carpenter would have been quite prepared for it. The widow retired to her chamber. Cymon rose a second time to take his departure.

"No hurry, Mr. Pyebush, sir," said Miles. "Ye're at home here, sir, I hope. I'd like a word with you the night. Make yourself comfortable and light one of your cigars, sir."

"You're very kind, and if Miss Cassidy has no objection——?"

"Is it Biddy? Faix and she's smoke-dried. I'm an ould smoker myself—that is, I was."

"Can I offer you one, Mr. Cassidy?"

"Thank ye kindly, sir. No. Pipes was my line when I was in that way at all. But, as I was saying a minute since, we ought to set up hospital in this house, sir. It's mighty expensive work, sickness. I'm all to pieces myself, for one."

"Work too much," said Cymon, puffing a cloud.

"Too much is it? If it was half enough I could work, Mr. Pyebush, sir, it's not the complaining man ye'd see me this night. The times is right down dreadful; and to come to the point, sir, it's a favour I want to ask you."

"Anything I can do, Mr. Cassidy, it is your right to demand."

"Kindly said, sir, and just; for I believe you've been well treated by me and mine, though I say it myself. Well, sir, I've made a ready-money purchase to-day that'll be as good as the making of a poor man like me, if I can raise the funds to pay for it to-morrow. Could ye lend me a trifle, sir? And there, it's out."

Biddy blushed up to her ears, and did not dare to look in the direction of her uncle. Her glance would have been a reproach.

"Depends upon what you consider a trifle, Mr. Cassidy," Pyebush answered, with his usual frankness.

"The governor's been very liberal lately — hearing of the progress I am making, thanks to Miss Cassidy; and I'm not so often in want of a ten-pound note as I have been. If one of them would be of any service——"

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Miles, a little chap-fallen; "anything would be a service. But it's a matter of two hundred I wanted for this bargain. It's a little fortune I'd make by it if I could get it."

"Upon my soul, Mr. Cassidy, I could no more raise two hundred pounds than I could jump over the moon."

"Think o' that now! and wid your name and breeding! I'd ha' thought a man like you would only have to scratch his name to a bit o' writing to raise thousands in a minute. But there! it's little we poor folks know."

"I don't suppose my bill for two hundred pounds would fetch twenty, Mr. Cassidy."

"Ain't that your own modesty, sir? Couldn't ye think o' some one that would advance a thrifle on your security—and my own, you know? Mine's as good as the bank, though I'm without a penny at prisint."

Biddy could control herself no longer.

"Uncle," she said, "you know you have more than two hundred pounds in the house."

"Hould your tongue!" said Miles, turning upon

her fiercely. "How dar' ye spake of my having money in the house? If I have, it's none o' mine: ye know well, that to touch it would be a sin and a crime in me. Misther Pyebush, sir, I've a heavy charge on my shoulders—none knows the weight of it but me—and my back's well-nigh broke with it. It's mane, dhurty, and shabby things I'm forced to do, or thry to do betimes, sir. If ye knew why, ye'd forgive me. I humbly ask your pardon, sir, for thrying to dhrag you into my troubles. If ye had the money—there, in your hands—I wouldn't touch it now, for the betther mind's on me."

It was Biddy's own uncle Miles that spoke there. She fondled his throbbing head against her bosom, and kissed his wrinkled forehead over and over again.

"Do have a cigar, Mr. Cassidy," said Cymon Pyebush, in rather a choking voice.

"Thank ye kindly, sir; I'll thry for wanst," said Miles, smiling through certain misty indications on his cheeks and eyelashes. "And Biddy, darlin', bring out the dhrop of whisky that's left. It's months since I've looked at it. Maybe there's such a thing as brooding too much on throubles. We can fight 'em better by looking off from them now and again."

They sat amicably chatting together for nearly a couple of hours. Miles seemed more like his former self than Biddy had known him for months. If that

prodigal Ned would only return, Biddy thought, before his departure had been discovered, we should be so happy! It would bring back luck to the house. *The other* might follow.

It was not fated to be so. At about eleven o'clock an incoherent shout was heard from Jimmy's chamber. The trio rushed up-stairs to ascertain the cause of the alarm, and made the fearful discovery which we have already seen the cause of so much disquietude to the majority of our characters.

For two entire days Miles Cassidy remained in a state of delirium. He was constantly watched by Frank, Biddy, and the faithful Cymon. Poor Widow Quelch was completely *hors de combat.* Her beloved son had disappeared mysteriously. The widow would hear of nothing but that her darling had been murdered and made away with by the unknown burglars. She was clamorous to have the river dragged. Being called upon to give evidence at the inquest, she obeyed with alacrity. Fancy the poor creature's horror when she discovered that the evidence she had given, in all trusting simplicity, proved to be the means of fixing suspicion on her own son! The incident of the gruel had not transpired at the examination before the magistrate. The watchful Mr. Twist had no sooner mastered the particulars thereof than he proceeded to institute a careful search

in Samuel's sleeping apartment. There were many physic bottles on the rough window-sill of the loft. One of these had an aspect of freshness. It was labelled, "The composing draught: two tea-spoonsful to be taken at bed-time.—S. Quelch." The phial, however, was quite empty. Mr. Twist put it in his pocket, and proceeded with it to the residence of the surgeon whose name was inscribed on the label. He there ascertained that the potion had only been made up a few hours before the discovery of the murder, and that the vanished contents were more than enough to last the patient for a week. Upon this he returned to the carpenter's, and propounded to Mrs. Quelch and Biddy the curious question, "Was Jimmy fond of gruel?" They were bound to reply in the affirmative. Mrs. Quelch had been in the habit of compounding a highly spiced and palatable variety of that not usually esteemed refreshment for her invalid darling, stray sips of which the latter had been known to administer to Jimmy from time to time. A friendship had been established between the two in consequence of this delicate hospitality on the part of Samuel.

Mr. Twist then sauntered into the yard, and accosted Jimmy himself in an amicable manner. Jimmy had been liberated under surveillance, and was permitted to resume his old vocations.

"Take a walk with me, Jimmy?" said Mr. Twist.

Jimmy shook his head, and grinned in the negative.

"Why not?"

"Mas'r's poorly—catch it."

"But I've got some first-rate gruel at my house. You like gruel, don't you, Jimmy?"

Jimmy became suddenly grave, and shook his head more violently than ever.

"Not now," he said; "did once."

"Why not now—eh, Jimmy?"

"Sam gave me some—make me walk about so—and tumble down. Told me—go to bed, fear Miss Biddy see me. No gruel again."

"Better than I expected, Jimmy. All right, old boy. Gruel's bad for you. Don't forget that, mind."

"Never forget," said Jimmy, with an air of extreme profundity.

"That's the ticket. Good arternoon!"

Mr. Twist cocked his hat on one side and departed, whistling a lively measure.

Miles Cassidy recognised none of his attendants during his delirium. He raved incessantly, but his ravings were mostly unintelligible. He spoke frequently of his sons, his niece, and most of the personages we have seen him brought in contact with; but his chief topic was the money of which

he had been robbed. Money was the besetting theme of his madness. Now he would praise its efficacy, in luxurious visions scarcely inferior to those of Sir Epicure Mammon himself; then he would curse its power for evil like a very Timon.

On the morning of the third day of his illness he fell into a deep sleep, which lasted for many hours. Towards the close of it he was discovered to be in a profuse perspiration. He awakened about mid-day, when his eyes fell on a latterly unaccustomed sight. It was the figure of a graceful, handsome young man, in the garb of a workman—fustian trousers, canvas apron, and shirt sleeves rolled up over the elbow, holding a saw in his hand. It was poor Frank, come back to his quarries—a carpenter once more!

"Which is that?" Miles inquired, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Dear father, do you not know me? It is I—Frank."

"Come back—home?"

"Yes—never, never to leave you again."

"But that dress—the shirt sleeves and the apron?"

"It is my proper dress. I should never have quitted it."

Miles muttered inaudibly to himself for a few seconds, and then added, shortly, "Send Biddy."

Biddy required no sending for. She flew from a

hiding-place behind some curtains, falling on her knees by the bedside of her uncle. One of the invalid's trembling hands played with her golden tresses, as with the other he pointed to Frank.

"Tell me, alanna," he said,—"you never deceived the ould man yet—is *that* true?"

"True, uncle?"

"Is it him, himself, alive? Not one of the wild shapes I have been seeing in my dhrames?"

"It is your own Frank, uncle, restored to us—sorry he ever left us. He has been here ever since you have been ill."

"Is it me that's been ill?"

"Very—very ill, uncle."

"And him here all the time!—what doing?"

"What he should be doing—looking after you and the workshop. We have been through all the accounts. He has attended to everything as well as you could have done yourself. He will never leave us again, and we shall make a fortune yet."

Miles broke into a short hysterical laugh.

"To the divil wid fortune," he said, "so long as he's back! What do we want of it now, I'd like to be tould? But there's no shame nor disgrace on his name?"

"None, uncle."

"Holy Virgin be praised! then I've done right, afther all. Come here, boy, and hould my hand.

You the other, darlin', on this side. I 've kept my bargain. I was fearful I 'd failed to start you right, and so do my duty by them that 's gone. I 'd thought I 'd put you in the wrong track, and should have to begin my work over again. That 's why I grew skin-flint and miser for you, darlin'. Whatever you was, it was my making—and if it all had to be begun fresh from the beginning, I 'm too ould and wake to work for ye as I wanst did. Money 's the ould man's sinews. But the work 's done, and well done, on the ould terms of conthract. She says ye are still the good and thrue man I thried to make you, and *she* can't lie. I 'd face them that 's gone now in heaven. We 'll have the ould times back: we 'll read the poethry and the stories o' nights. We 'll have the pipe and the noggin betimes. Divil another farthing will I touch from Misther Pyebush. Good luck to him! Make him a bishop first, and send his sowl to glory in sixty years to come! We 'll send Misther Jivarney about his business, as gintalely as may be—he manes kindly, but he 's none of our sort. Holy Virgin! what am I saying? The man 's murdered!"

"Dear uncle," said Biddy, "calm yourself. You have talked too much. We will speak of that dreadful business some other time."

"It was Jimmy throttled him, wasn't it, while staling my money?" Miles inquired, excitedly; and

then suddenly broke into a low laugh. "The poor chap might have took it all, and kindly welcome, if I 'd known this darling here was coming back to us. It 's a mighty dhurty business that same money—but useful now and again."

Miles dozed off for a few seconds, smiling placidly; after a while he opened his eyes, and inquired, in cheerful tones:

"Where 's the blatherumskite?"

"Whom do you mean, uncle?"

"Ned, the blackguard—what 's he up to?"

Frank and his cousin exchanged uneasy glances.

"He will not be home to-day, uncle; perhaps not to-morrow. But you will see him soon. He is quite well."

"Divil doubt him," laughed Miles. "What should ail him? if it 's not a fit of the tanthrums, or a thrifle too much of the cratur. It 's my son that, Biddy, made afther a rough ugly pattern. Here 's the tendher plant that wanted the hothouse training. I never towld you, darling," said Miles, caressing Frank's imprisoned hand with inexpressible fondness, "that you was always the favourite. When you left us alone here I thought it was a judgment on me for making a difference between the pair of ye. I was too proud of you, darling, as a bit of my own work, and thought God was punishing me for my presumption."

"Whatever I have about me that is good, dear father, I owe to you."

"Ay ay, alanna! but the bargain was to make a *dale* of good out of you. I can show him now, Biddy, as a tip-top job, complete and finished: can't I?"

"You can, indeed, uncle."

"Then I'm willing to take my work home to-morrow, and ask if it's well done. Let me sleep now, darlings, and don't let go o' my hands. To think of that poor chap meeting his death for a bit o' blackguard money! God be merciful to his sowl, he has my forgiveness if he's left me a beggar."

Miles recovered with surprising rapidity. The presence of his long-lost Frank proved an anodyne for all his sufferings. In a day or two he was considered strong enough to bear the shock which the news of poor Ted's dilemma could not but cause him. It was a trying experiment, but there was no help for it, as he would be required to give evidence on Ted's second examination. The consequences were nearly being fatal, but the old man was strangely himself again. He rallied from the shock, and declared it was the greatest occasion for his old duty of work he had ever yet met with. He had no shadow of a doubt of Ted's innocence. He applied himself with marvellous diligence and clearness to master the whole particulars of the case. The history of the necklace

produced a deep impression on him. He had this repeated to him in all its bearings over and over again. The discovery of the trinket in Ned's pocket; Sir Paul Evershed's first claiming, then denying all knowledge of it; its resemblance to the one in the picture at Brayle Manor, and the evident fact discovered by Frank months ago of that picture being the original of the engraving so highly prized by Miles Cassidy.

"There is the hand of the Lord in this," said Miles, solemnly bowing his head. "His ways are inscrutable, and we must await His will. Only stand by me, darling. When the day comes I may be forced to say things that I scarcely dare say to myself, and I shall want support."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE WITNESS-BOX.

THE eventful day arrived. Ned's remand had been for a week, and the delay proved to be favourable to him; for, in the mean time, the magistrate who had first examined him had been stricken with something uncomfortably like a fit of apoplexy, and was unable to preside on the second occasion. His place was supplied by a very different person—a gentleman of high breeding and education, and moreover a man of feeling—none the less so from the fact that he had been an eminent lawyer in his younger days.

The court was crowded—nearly all the prominent characters in our history being present. Ned appeared very pale and emaciated, but so thoroughly dignified and self-possessed—so utterly unlike the loose, careless Edward Cassidy, with whom the townsfolk were familiar—that Miss Gertrude Brayle, hanging upon the arm of Mr. Sparrowbill's old legal friend in a

sheltered corner of the court-house, could not repress the observation that he looked more like a Brayle than a murderer, though the terms in former ages had been known to be sometimes convertible.

Numerous depositions, proving the robbery and assassination, were taken. With the substance of these the reader is already familiar. The real interest of the proceedings commenced when the name of Miles Cassidy was called.

Miles entered the court-room leaning on the arm of his inseparable Frank. A murmur of sympathy ran through the assembly as the old man bowed his white head to the justice, and then smiled encouragingly to the accused. As he approached the witness-box he stopped, and addressing himself respectfully to the bench, said:

"May I ask a great favour, your honour?"

"What is it, my good man?"

"I 'm just from a bed of sickness, sir, and mighty wake. I 've things to say about them dearest to me as would try a stronger man. Will you let the darling here stand in the box by my side? I 'll be able to spake the thruth better."

"Certainly, there can be no objection to that."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

Miles entered the witness-box, assisted by the attentive Frank, whose arm he clutched nervously

within his own, and took the oath. This done, he bowed his head and stood to be interrogated.

"You are the prisoner's father, I believe?" the magistrate inquired.

"I don't know, sir," Miles replied, in tones of startling solemnity.

All hearers were alike astonished—the two hitherto supposed brothers no less than the rest.

"What am I to understand by that statement?" the magistrate asked.

"What it says, sir. I'm on my oath, and there's a dear life at stake, maybe, on what I say."

"But the prisoner is your reputed son?"

"He is, sir."

"And have you any reason to believe that he is not your son?"

"I only know this, sir, that one of those two boys—this darling I'm houlding on to here for support, and the other one there, where he has no business to be—*is* my son. But which of the two it may be, through the prayers and trials of twenty-two years it has not pleased the Lord to enlighten me."

A long pause of respectful silence followed this impressive declaration. Then the buzzes of wonder and curiosity began to be heard in the court.

"Have you any objection to tell me the motives of your doubt upon this subject?" the magistrate asked.

"Big ones, sir. But if ating them will do *him* any good" (pointing to the prisoner), "I'll swallow them whole in no time—cost what it may."

The justice reflected a few seconds, and then said:

"I think, at least, it would enable us to get at the truth as to your actual relations with the prisoner. From that we shall be better able to judge of his probable motives, or the absence of such motives, for committing a crime to your injury."

"Thank you for that, sir. The thruth will set him right, I'll be bound. But it will be hard work for me to tell my share of it, and I must beg your honour's patience."

"I am here only to elicit the truth, and my time is the public's. Proceed in your own fashion."

Miles scrubbed his forehead with his handkerchief, clutched Frank more closely to his side than ever, and essayed to speak. His voice, however, failed him.

"Take your time, my good friend," said the humane magistrate.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Miles; "you encourage me to ask you a bit of a favour before I begin."

"Pray name it."

"Well, it's to explain a thrifling matther of law to me," Miles answered, with a glimpse of his old humorous twinkle of the eye.

"If I can do so, I will; only do not occupy too much of the court's time."

"I won't, sir. It's about what they call the amnesty of Cornwallish."

"What of it? It is pretty well known, I believe."

"To book-larning folks maybe, sir. But I'm a poor ignorant man. It grants pardon, I'm tould, to all boys as was out in the throubles of Ninety-eight?"

"You mean all persons engaged in the Irish insurrection of Seventeen hundred and ninety-eight?"

"That 's it, sir."

"Certainly: provided they gave up their arms at the time, and have not since acted against the government."

"That 's law, is it, sir?"

"Certainly."

"I 've your word for it?"

"Unquestionably."

"I'll take it, sir. I gave up my arms in a twinkle, seeing they was only a blunderbush and a rape-hook, and sent a civil note to Lord Cornwallish in my own handwriting, which Father Fannan was kind enough to put on paper for me, humbly axing the government's pardon for my share of the throubles, which was mighty small. And sorra's the arm I 've touched since more dangerous than a gimlet."

"Then I am to understand you were one of the United Irishmen?"

"A thrifle that way inclined maybe, sir," the witness answered, with a scarcely perceptible twinkle of the eye. "Less than some though, by a dale."

A general laugh greeted this magnificent palliation.

"But what has this to do with the birth and identity of the prisoner?"

"I'll tell you, sir"—Miles's voice grew husky,

and he spoke evidently with great effort—"in as few words as I can put it. I had a wife, sir—a young wife; too good for me or any living man, now or to come. But that's past. You must know, sir, I joined 'the boys' without her knowing it, and sore again her will."

"How could it be against her will, if she knew nothing about it?" the magistrate could not help asking, with a smile.

"When she came to find it out, sir," Miles politely interpreted his national form of expression. "Still it was for her sake I did it. Mighty wild dhrames we boys had, to be sure, of what the Rivolushin was going to do for us all——. But there—that's politics—that is. Well, sir, it was on——"

Miles paused to breathe heavily, and scrub his forehead with great violence. The task he had set himself was evidently no easy one. He resumed:

"It was on the 7th of September, sir, ninety-eight, the day before they was driven out of the country for good and all——"

"Who were driven out?"

"The French, bad luck to 'em! more betoken they got it, that time."

"You allude, I suppose, to the attempted invasion on the Killala coast?"

"Thank ye kindly, sir, for saving me the words. That's it, sir! Killala's my native place, and them

two boys as well—leastways the nearest thing to one we've got left to boast of."

"Got left—how so?"

"The thrifling bit of a village hard by, where we was all three born, came to grief at the same time as we did."

The quaintness of Miles's expressions was the result of the painful crowding of oppressive recollections. He had never been farther from mirth in his life. His streaming brows and trembling frame testified to his perfect seriousness.

"Explain yourself more clearly."

"It was blown up, sir—burnt down—thrampled under foot—and hammered into smithereens intirely, on the day I spake of; and there's been no thought of building it up again, I'm thinking."

"What was the name of that village?" inquired an eager female voice, that startled the whole assembly.

The interruption was contrary to all court discipline, no doubt. But the speaker was above all rebuke, for it was no other than Lady Harriett Brayle, whose unusual presence at such a scene had been hitherto considered the crowning wonder of the event. Her ladyship had come, escorted by Mr. Sparrowbill and his friend the ex-attorney, of whom mention has been already made. On taking so unexpectedly an active part in the proceedings,

the old lady had risen from the chair which had been provided for her, and stood confronting the witness with a piercing look. She appeared greatly excited, and trembled exceedingly.

"Tell me the name of the village," she repeated.

"Ballyraine, my lady, when it had one."

"My God, the same!" Lady Harriett exclaimed, and fell heavily into her seat.

A companion expression of surprise was heard from another part of the court, at the same moment. The voice of Sir Paul Evershed was recognised, but its owner kept discreetly in the background—rather near the door than otherwise.

Lady Harriett signified, by a sign to the magistrate, her wish that the witness should be encouraged to proceed.

Miles continued amid the breathless silence of his auditors, whose interest in his narrative was now increased tenfold. His sentences were disjointed and scarcely audible.

"On that day, sir, I returned home—home that was—after a long journey, to find—to find—— Whew! I'll be breaking down I'm thinking, after all."

Lady Harriett Brayle had risen from her seat a second time, and again spoke in tones of earnest entreaty, extending her clasped hands towards the witness.

"For pity's sake, proceed!"

Miles Cassidy was surprise proof. He fixed an expressionless stare upon the old lady, whose interference with his affairs he accepted as a portion of his bewildering destiny, and dutifully exerted himself to comply with her request.

"I returned—to find—my cabin—a hape of smouldhering ruins, and my wife—a corpse in her own bed—buried under them, having given birth to a child."

A murmur of sympathy ran through the assembly. The interest of all was divided between the witness and Lady Harriett, the increase of whose agitation was painful to behold. The magistrate had quite forgotten his official position, and was as much interested as the veriest gossip present.

"And that child?" he inquired.

"Is here, sir—in this court—one of these two boys."

"And you do not know which?"

Miles shook his head hopelessly.

"And the other?" Lady Harriett said hoarsely. "Let him finish his story—quick!—beg him to finish it, or it will kill me."

Miles stared at the old lady—who seemed utterly indifferent to the attention she was exciting—as before; scrubbed his forehead, and resumed:

"I'll describe it to your ladyship, and your

honour. The bed was here, as may be: it was charred, and splinthered, and—and—never mind what it looked like. By the side of it—in that corner, so to speak—was the little wooden cradle of my own making. The roof had come in, but it was merciful Heaven's will that a bit of timber should fall aslant over it, so as to keep the two darlings alive and safe."

"The two?"

"They was both there, sir! Mighty long time it was before I dared to lift that bit of wood; but when I did, there they was both, wide awake, and with scarcely a scratch, smiling at me like angels."

"Your wife had given birth to twins, then? It is very simple."

"Wrong, sir! One wasn't hers."

"How do you know that?"

"There was TWO corpses on the bed, sir: her own, and a beautiful strange young lady's, dead—locked in each other's arms. Both mothers, sir; and within a short time of each other. Never a doubt of it."

Upon this Lady Harriett Brayle swooned away, falling heavily upon the floor. She was speedily raised and conveyed to the open air.

The business of the court was completely suspended. The magistrate, relaxing from his judicial dignity, discussed the late scene with a knot of his

personal friends. The audience part of the assembly became a perfect Babel of confused chatter. The officers were too busy with their own speculations to think of keeping order. In a few minutes a flock of the wildest *canards* were flying all over the town. Lady Harriett Brayle, recognising in Miles Cassidy a long-lost brother—(or, according to some, a first husband by a secret marriage)—believed to have been executed for unheard-of atrocities committed during the Irish disturbances—had taken poison in the open court to avoid survival of the shame. Miles Cassidy had confessed to burning down an entire village, murdering two ladies in their beds, and kidnapping their children. The supposed sons of the carpenter were not his sons at all, though he confessed to having a son somewhere—probably Soft Jimmy. Edward was the son of Cassidy's wife by a titled seducer—brought up by Miles to a career of crime from vindictive motives. Ned had confessed to the murder at his supposed father's instigation. Miles was a French spy. The money secreted in his house had been funds subscribed for a new invasion of Ireland under the late Mr. Giovanni, who proved a French admiral in disguise. Him the entire Cassidy family had conspired to murder, in order to make off with the booty. If not exactly the above, a score of rumours, equally wild and preposterous, were in circulation among the rarely-excited townsfolk, ere it had been ascertained

in the court whether Lady Harriett Brayle was alive or dead, likely to recover or not.

In the mean time, what were our three principal personages thinking of?

Miles was thinking of the past. A vast weight had been removed from his heart by the disclosure of his life-secret. He was glad the effort had been forced upon him, and that it was over. He felt strangely composed and cheerful. The struggle to recall the past had so severely taxed his weakened faculties, that he could not fully comprehend the present situation. He sat in the witness-box, nursing Frank's hand fondly, nodding and smiling friendly encouragement to Ned. But his thoughts were far away. He was thinking—when was he not?—of a bright vision that had descended, as from heaven, to illumine his earthly path for a brief while, and had vanished from his sight; but not till the spirit-wings had touched his soul to leave it purified and elevated. Of a strange fair girl, with large dark eyes, who had come among his humble clansmen from afar—no one knew whence—friendless and unknown; seemingly of a superior race, but casting her lot cheerfully with theirs, earning her bread by the labour of her hands. Who was she? Miles wondered now, as he had wondered twenty-three years ago, and ever since. But he had never asked. She had said, when he first saw and loved her, that her name was Mary

Gerald, and that all her kinsfolk were dead. It was enough to have a name to love her by—to love her without one! and that she wished to keep her origin a secret. Her lightest wish to Miles was sacred law, and woe to the prying knave who should try and penetrate this mystery! And she had condescended to bless and elevate with her love him! rough, worthless Miles Cassidy. She had selected him—(was this mysterious Mary so bad a judge?)—from a crowd of more prosperous suitors, and had become his wife. He had worshipped her: he worshipped her still. He had broken the laws in the belief that he was furthering her honour and advantage in doing so. There was no more crime in this than in a man fighting for his religion. She had been cruelly torn from him. Was this a punishment to him for not consulting her, or for not divining that the only ways acceptable in her eyes were those of peace, not strife? He could not think so; for she had blessed him even in her departure. She had left him a priceless legacy of sweet memories, of sustaining hope, and of sacred duty. She had strengthened and purified his heart before setting it a noble task to do. How had he performed that task? Was it well done? Could he claim that hoped-for reward of an after-union, which was his one idea of heaven?

And Frank? Alas for our poor poet! it is to be feared that his thoughts—much against his will—

took a very earthly and selfish turn. The bare possibility, soon strengthened into a hope, that he was not Miles Cassidy's son, but the child of gentle parents, had set his brain in a whirl. What if he should prove Bell Evershed's equal in rank and wealth? Shame! shame, Frank, to wish for any other father than that noble Miles Cassidy, who brought you to Oxford on his back! Frank felt the shame most poignantly, but could not repress the wish notwithstanding.

And Ned—what was he thinking of? His danger? Not a whit. His love and jealousy? Not even of them. He, too, was thinking only of the recent disclosure, and hoping in his heart of hearts, that if the mystery of his birth should ever be solved it would prove that he, and not Frank, would have the right to call Miles Cassidy father. But he had little doubt of the issue. Was not Frank obviously a born gentleman, and himself a coarse, riotously-disposed plebeian? To be sure! Stop though, an after-thought! Would *that* establish any likeness between him and Miles Cassidy? Ted was afraid not, and was puzzled.

Miles remained absorbed in his reverie, unconscious of the lapse of time. There was much buzzing of voices and trampling of feet going on about him; but he heeded it not. At length he was recalled to himself by the voice of the magistrate addressing him.

"Witness, there is a gentleman here—the legal

adviser of a person very much interested in the issue of this case—who would like to ask you some further questions in connection with the painful scene you have described, if you feel equal to answer them. Remote as the connection between the two events may seem, I believe your compliance will throw some important light on the matter we are met to investigate."

"I am here on oath, sir, to speak all the truth I know," said Miles, more self-possessed than before.

The legal gentleman was Mr. Sparrowbill's old friend—still qualified to practise in the public courts—who appeared on behalf of Lady Harriett. He commenced his examination.

"You have no idea who the deceased lady was?"

"None, sir."

"What reason had you to suppose that she had been of a rank superior to your own?"

"A many, sir. Scraps of clothes lying about—her delicate hands and hair. Besides, I'd heard of her coming to the place the day before in a post-chaise."

"Still, might not the children have been both your wife's?"

"No, sir. The childher was marked on the arms with needle-points and gunpowder—one with a diamond, the other with a cross—as if to distinguish them. They bear the marks to this day."

"This might have been a precaution of your wife's.

There is still a strong resemblance between the young men."

"Faix an' that 's what 's been puzzling of me ever since I picked them up! But they 're not of the same mother. Them as tould me of the lady's coming to the house said she was in labour; and the surgeon of one of the French regiments had been fetched to deliver her. My own Mary's throuble was, perhaps, hurried on by it."

"Who gave you this information?"

"My own brother, sir—Michael by name. I met him coming towards the hills."

"Is he living?"

"Shot, sir, six years later, with the Defenders," said Miles, in a low voice.

"And the French surgeon?"

"Faix, sir, an' it 's mighty few Frenchmen was left alive in the place by the time I got there."

"And you made no effort to inquire who the deceased lady was?"

"Who 'd I ask, sir? The dead corpses—or the yeomanry—or my Lord Cornwallish's red-coats? A mighty civil answer they 'd have given me—me, with a halther as good as round my neck."

"Then what course did you pursue?"

"The nighest one to the Wicklow mountains, with the two boys in my arms. Small blame, I 'm thinking."

"Believing one of them was not your own?"

"But knowing one of 'em *was*," said Miles, thumping the ledge before him with sudden energy and indignation. "Would you have had me toss up head or harp for my own, and lave the loser to find *his* father among the dead? There's what I did, your honour," said Miles, with increased warmth, turning contemptuously from the old lawyer to the magistrate. "It's a thrying matter this laying bare a man's heart, that he's kept locked up for twenty years, before a court full of strangers. I'll get it over, if you plaze, quick. I did this, sir: I took the two living darlings in my arms, and tried to compare their faces with them of the two dead ones. It wasn't a good time for clear eyesight, and the poor dead crathurs in the bed was sore disfigured. I was like an *omadhaun*, as you may suppose. If I had known which was my own child, I might have been brute baste enough to lave the other to its fate. But, for fear of hurting my own, I was forced to hould 'em both tenderly, and keep looking at them; and one was as purty as the other—as you see 'em now. But I only wanted the one that was hers. Then I thought I'd pray to Heaven to tell me—by my heart—which was my own boy, and I did—if the howling of a madman can be called prayer. The blessed Heaven wouldn't listen to my ravings. I got calm in a bit, and a holy thought came over me, that

it was the Lord's will I should be a father to them both! How have I done it, boys?"

Frank fell weeping upon the old man's neck. Ted extended his arms fondly in a gesture of embrace. The whole assemblage was deeply affected.

"Have ye done with me, gentlemen?"

"One more question only," said the old lawyer. "Had the lady no papers, trinkets, or other valuables about her by which she might be identified?"

"You were never in a town after a siege, sir, that's plain. The poor bodies had scarcely decent covering."

"Have you any recollection of this?"

The old man produced the famous necklace. Miles looked at it with keen interest as he replied:

"I've seen the drawing of one like it in a printed picture in my own house; that's all."

"But you will swear you have never seen the necklace itself?"

"I'm on oath to all I say. Never, sir."

"A last question. Have you had no clue to the lady's identity since you came to this neighbourhood?"

"None."

"And your coming here had no connection with a design to find it out?"

"Holy mother! how should it? No."

"I will trouble you no farther for the present.

May I be permitted to call upon Sir Paul Evershed?"

"Sir Paul Evershed!" was called, and echoed and echoed again into the outer distance. The baronet had justified Mr. Sparrowbill's eulogium on his proficiency in the art of bolting. He was not to be found.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MURDER OUT.

THE course of Edward Cassidy's examination might have been that of true love itself. It was fated *not* to run smoothly towards a reasonably anticipated conclusion. Only one more interruption to the proceedings, however, remains to be chronicled.

While the audience were consoling themselves as they best might for the non-appearance of so distinguished a performer as Sir Paul Evershed, the trampling of many feet and the murmurs of many voices were heard approaching the court-house. Mr. Twist's right-hand man, James, entered with an air of importance, and whispered a few words to the magistrate, among which the significant expression, "Got the right man," was audible to the nearest bystanders. The magistrate nodded, and whispered in reply. James bustled out of the court, and returned shortly afterwards in the rear of a singular procession.

First, Mr. Twist himself, as general in command of the division. Immediately following, and paternally watched by that officer, came our friend Soft Jimmy, bearing in his gigantic arms a burden, at the sight of which every spectator shuddered and sickened. It was the figure—or rather the living anatomy—of a man, reduced to a state of emaciation and squalor that was inconceivably horrible to behold. It was difficult, at first, to believe that the object was alive. It seemed rather a newly-exhumed corpse, reeking with the dews and exhalations of the grave. The limbs hung powerless, the spine was bent into an unresisting curve, the head fell heavily over the bearer's arm. A glance at the upturned face was requisite to convince the spectator that a living creature was before him; but *that* sufficed most fearfully. It was a sight to be avoided—never to be forgotten. The eyes blood-shot, wide open, and lighted by an unearthly brilliancy, seemed really as if they would burst from their parched and enfeebled ligaments. The inflamed nostrils quivered and dilated like those of a horse in mortal peril. The attenuated muscles of the forehead and cheeks were rigidly fixed in deep corrugations. The teeth were firmly set together. The parched, bloodless lips, separated above them, moved idly, as if without the guidance of volition. A more abject picture of Terror congealing into Despair could not be imagined.

And to this complexion, reader, had our missing acquaintance, Mr. Samuel Quelch, been brought by the combined forces of character and circumstances.

Horrible as was Sam's aspect, it was yet more endurable than that of another personage in the newly arrived group. This was the miserable wretch's more wretched mother, who walked rigidly after him between two constables. The idea of a dead body with a living head—its features the incarnation of mortal Fear—is awful enough. What shall be said of a human figure erect, and moving with measured precision, surmounted by the bloodless, expressionless visage of a corpse? Such was the unhappy widow's appearance as she entered the court of justice.

One of the constables at her side carried a bundle.

"Bravo, Special!" said Mr. Twist, slapping the idiot approvingly on the back. "You 'll make a name at Bow Street, yet! Put him down there!"

Jimmy deposited his burden in a seat indicated, and looked around him with a swelling chest and a dilating eye. Jimmy had distinguished himself by the capture of Sam Quelch, and was as proud as a terrier that has killed a rat—ay, or as a St. George who has overcome a dragon.

As I presume no doubt exists in the reader's mind that Sam Quelch was the real and sole author of the crime which we have seen place Edward Cassidy in

such awkward peril, I may as well state briefly that such was satisfactorily proved to be the case within a very few minutes of Sam's appearance in custody. The proofs against him were so overwhelming that he made no attempt to refute them. Indeed, he had scarcely the physical power to do so. To plead guilty and whimper for his life, which seemed to be fast deserting him, was all he was equal to. Ned Cassidy was immediately set at liberty, assured by the magistrate that his character was without a stain.

The circumstances of the murder and of its detection may be briefly narrated.

Poor Mr. Giovanni, it appeared, had really fallen a martyr to the canon of law and friendship. He had surprised Sam Quelch in the act of rifling the strong box of his revered friend and landlord, and Sam had been under the painful necessity of silencing him. This had proved, perhaps, an easier task than the operator had expected, for the Italian was old and enfeebled by a complication of diseases; the murderer's unlucky grip had possibly only anticipated a natural death by a few days: whereas Sam, while counterfeiting lingering illness, had accumulated muscular fibre at the expense of Miles Cassidy's flesh-pots. Sam declared that he had not intended to kill the old gentleman, but merely to frighten him into silence; but as he had stabbed the old gentle-

man first, and throttled him afterwards, the excuse was not accepted as one of remarkable validity.

Next to an inherent disposition to do evil and to feed well, Sam had been tempted to his crime by one of those baits of opportunity which the enemy of man is so diligent in tossing into the troublous waters of human existence. In the ample leisure afforded him, in his assumed character of invalid, he had amused himself (with an eye to business), with making a careful survey of the carpenter's premises. A—— is an old-fashioned town of monastic origin, and is curiously undermined with subterranean passages. Of course, the usual explanation of such mysteries obtains credence among the simple-minded natives. There was once, they say, a monastery on one side of the river, and a nunnery on the other. Subfluvial communication between the two edifices was established with a view to unhallowed practices, for which some precedent may be found in the veritable legend of the *Comte Ory*. With these idle stories we have nothing to do. Let it suffice that Miles Cassidy's house and workshop—standing as we know on the brink of the river—had been built originally on the site, and partly from the *débris*, of some forgotten ecclesiastical edifice. On the right hand of the courtyard stood a boat-shed, the space of which was occupied chiefly by an invalided punt. Mr. Quelch, seeking a convenient hiding-place for certain

inconsiderable spoils of various larcenies (committed by him during his convalescence, for the purpose of keeping his hand in practice), had discovered that the flat bottom of this punt, rotted by age and exposure, was removable, nobody apparently being aware of the circumstance. Between the planks of the punt and the unpaved ground beneath Sam had been in the habit of concealing the fruits of his magpie industry. One day, having imperative cause for sudden concealment of a newly acquired prize, he had jumped somewhat heavily upon this ground. To his horror the soil gave way beneath him, and he found himself precipitated to a depth of several feet below the surface. Recovered from his first surprise and alarm, he reconnoitered his situation, and found that he stood in a vaulted passage, extending some yards in the direction of the river. Here it came to an abrupt termination, being choked up by stones and rubbish.

The mere discovery of such a glorious hiding-place to an individual of Sam's secretive tendencies was a temptation to robbery. A painter in contemplation of an unusually well-prepared canvas; a country actor for the first time standing on the boards of a London theatre; a poor enthusiastic fiddler intrusted with a priceless Cremona or Stradivarius; a South-sea Island tattooer with the offer of a white man's skin to operate upon;—none of these could be more

violently provoked to an exercise of his artistic talents than was Sam Quelch by the discovery of such an admirable receptacle for plunder. Who could refuse to be a brigand, with the exclusive possession of a robber's cave like that?

Sam had the elements of a really great criminal in his composition. His plan of the robbery—which it is believed has been pretty clearly indicated in a previous chapter—was very skilfully contrived. The counterfeited illness, the early retirement to rest, and the "hocussing" of Soft Jimmy, were inspirations of a high order in their degree, and most successfully carried out. The unexpected return, however, of Miles and Mr. Giovanni had frustrated the artist's best intentions. That awkward necessity of throttling Mr. Giovanni had thrown him out of his calculations a little. Still, like a true general, Sam had the presence of mind to extract benefit even from disaster. The disagreeable business accomplished, he bethought him of his friend Sir Paul Evershed's anxiety to obtain certain papers believed to be in the possession of the deceased. He accordingly rifled the dead man's pocket, finding therein a packet of documents, evidently secured with the most jealous care. These Sam considered might prove of service in the hour of peril. (He had all Sir Paul's philosophy about him, you see!) Having secured them, he made his escape through the window by which he had entered. On

reaching the courtyard he found the household alarmed, and betook himself instinctively to his hiding-place. It was an injudicious step; but remember, that Sam had been taken at a disadvantage. The crime of murder had not originally entered into his programme, and it was a first attempt. He was naturally a little flurried.

Mr. Twist, on the night of the murder, had made no careful inspection of the premises, being fully convinced that the culprits had made off, and that it was his duty to follow them. In the morning he had returned to reconnoitre. But the aspect of the old punt, lying apparently on the solid earth, had not excited his suspicion. Sam had, therefore, lain undisturbed in his hiding-place. Hearing, however, the constant sound of voices and footsteps, he had feared to emerge till nightfall. In the course of the afternoon some workmen, for convenience, placed some heavy masses of timber in the old punt. In the evening, Sam, trying to lift the roof of his sanctuary, found himself a prisoner!

The sufferings of the unhappy wretch may be imagined. His choice lay between starvation and hanging. To give the alarm would have been fatal—to remain where he was, lingering death. On the second day of his confinement he could think of nothing better than to scoop out with his pocket-knife a small hole in the immovable planks above him,

for the sake of a little fresh air and daylight, with the opportunity of listening to what went on in the courtyard.

His only hope was in the aid of the poor creature who had been his uncomplaining victim from his birth, namely, his mother. If he could attract her attention she might, at least, furnish him with food and drink, perhaps the means of escape. Some time, however, elapsed before this opportunity was afforded him. The poor rascal was almost at his last extremity and growing desperate, when, hearing a familiar footstep and the rustle of female garments, he mustered strength and courage to gasp out the word "mother."

The widow recognised the well-known voice. Let us pass over the painful details of this episode. Suffice it that the woman found herself unable to liberate her son without calling for assistance, which would only have served to betray him. She fed him from time to time in the hiding-place, where he lay with his useless ill-gotten gold; thus enacting a hideous, squalid parody on the sweet story of Rothesay and the Fair Maid of Perth. The maternal succour, however, came too late; famine, cold, and terror, had done their work. Sam would have had his mother take some of the money, which he could easily pass her through the opening he had made with his knife, and purchase with it the assistance of some of his

disreputable acquaintances in the purlieus of Oxford, who, he hoped, might find some means to rescue him. With this proposal the widow obstinately refused compliance. She would not touch the gold of which her benefactor had been robbed. The papers found on the person of Mr. Giovanni, which Sam had solaced the first day of his confinement by looking over at the light of his extempore window, she agreed to take charge of, on her son's assurance that, in the event of his capture, they might prove the means of his liberation.

There were the materials of a Fouché, if not absolutely of a Richelieu, about Mr. Twist. He had an admirable scent for a useful instrument. He had been strangely fascinated by Miles Cassidy's ingenious idea, only recently brought within his observation, of making a watch-dog and hall-porter of a devoted unreasoning idiot. Such an agent, Mr. Twist argued, might be made very serviceable for detective purposes. He took a huge fancy to Soft Jimmy, whom he won to his constabulary desires, less by small gifts and playful attentions—that dose of soporific gruel had made Jimmy very suspicious—than by the device of persuading Miles Cassidy to impress upon his half-witted henchman the imperative duty of obeying the instructions of Mr. Twist on all occasions, as implicitly as if they were his own. Mr. Twist gave Jimmy to understand that, in the event of his failing

in obedience, Edward Cassidy would be hanged, and he, Jimmy, would be execrated by the entire family as the cause of that calamity. On the very day of Widow Quelch's discovery of her son's situation, Mr. Twist, ever hanging about the premises—chewing botanical specimens and whistling lively measures, as was his wont—divined at once, from the unhappy woman's trepidation and dejection, that she was in the secret of Sam's whereabouts. He therefore commanded Jimmy, under the most fearful penalties, to watch her movements, and, if he should succeed in tracking her to Sam's hiding-place, to bring the latter, at all hazards, dead or alive, to the police court.

"If he can once pin his bull," Mr. Twist soliloquised, "he won't let go alive. An uncommon useful dog! When this business is settled I 'll see if I can't persuade Cassidy to part with him. I should like him immensely."

The widow's keenly awakened maternal fears, however, made her extremely circumspect. She kept her dreadful secret for some days admirably. It was discovered at last—only on the day of Ted's examination. The poor woman, horrified, almost maddened, at the prospect of her kind employer's son suffering for the crime of her own graceless offspring, had been tempted to the incautious step of visiting Sam's hiding-place by daylight, to implore him to suggest some means of extricating Ned from his unmerited

danger. The watchful Jimmy was on the alert. The sound of Sam's voice was enough to make him spring forward like a tiger. He tore up the floor of the punt, unearthed the shivering, unresisting culprit in a twinkling, and agreeable to the instructions thoughtfully provided by Mr. Twist for such an emergency, shouted "murder" with all his might. Three or four workmen from the shop overhead ran to Jimmy's assistance, and Sam Quelch was in custody, with the rifled treasure beside him.

As Sam could scarcely be in safer hands, we will take leave of him for the present, and seek more reputable society.

We are once more in Miles Cassidy's humble sitting-room. It is some half-an-hour after Ted's liberation. Miles sits in his own arm-chair—the foster-brothers standing on each side of him. He holds them each by a hand with nervous jealousy, as if fearful that one or the other of his darlings will be again torn from him. He has reason, for the possession of one of his filial treasures is about to be hotly disputed with him. Biddy leans on the back of the chair, admiring her uncle, as usual. Cymon Pyebush looks on from an obscure corner, admiring Biddy, as always.

There is such an assembly of fashionable visitors present as the humble walls have never contained—

at any rate since they formed part of that forgotten monastic edifice, undermined for Sam Quelch's ruin. Opposite Miles Cassidy sits Lady Harriett Brayle, pale, anxious-looking, but perfectly collected. Bell—hastily sent for on the news of the old lady's illness—is at her grandmother's side. Miss Gertrude Brayle and Miss Bophus (never sent for in their lives, and never in the least degree wanted, except, possibly, by each other) are present also. Mr. Sparrowbill is of the number, with his old friend the lawyer. Mr. Bloss, radiant, and Mr. Long, gloomy, as usual, are also present—in an inexplicable state of sobriety. The distinguished circle is completed by the graceful form of Sir Paul Evershed and the less elegant person of his son, the under-secretary, newly arrived from London.

"Am I to understand that I am here on my trial?" Sir Paul Evershed inquires, folding his arms and looking scornfully round him.

"Understand, at least, that it is in your power to speak an important truth and to heal a great sorrow," Lady Harriett Brayle answers. "You can have nothing to gain by the concealment of your knowledge. If I have judged you rightly, you are not a man to indulge in gratuitous malice." (Lady Harriett is wrong there: she has not judged Sir Paul rightly.) "Which of these two young men is my grandchild?"

"Surely the instincts of natural affection should be the best guide to your ladyship."

"That's no good," interposed Miles Cassidy, simply; "two-and-twenty years I've been seeking to find out that same, and I'm no nearer than at the beginning."

"If you will not aid us," said the old lady, sadly, "the attempt is hopeless."

"Then I will aid you, madam," the baronet said, with a brusque assumption of virtuous indignation. "I have trifled with this ridiculous subject in the belief that it would soon fall to pieces from its inherent weakness. But your ladyship's credulity appears boundless, and I must treat it seriously. What was this man's motive in coming to Oxford?"

"Purty well known by this time," Miles answered. "I've been joked enough about it."

"It is highly probable, is it not, that an Irish labourer—from the wilds of Mayo—should have brought his two children to this part of the world, actuated by the mere dream of giving them a university education?"

"What other motive could he have had?"

"It has been made pretty apparent to-day, I should think. Mr. Cassidy is a clever man—a patient, watchful, calculating man—as all the town knows. I presume it is no secret at present that he

intends to pass off one of his sons—real or adopted—as heir to the title and estates of Brayle."

"I call God to witness that that man lies!" said Miles Cassidy, solemnly.

"Let us hear him out, father," said Ned. "Explain your meaning fully, sir, and then leave this house. You must have sense enough to know that your presence here is a great provocation to my father, brother, and myself—to any friend or member of the family, in fact."

"I am perfectly aware of the perils of this most respectable establishment. The fate of the estimable Signor Giovanni—my discharged valet—who was probably disposed to say more than was thought judicious, is quite fresh in my recollection, and should counsel me to silence. Unfortunately I am of a headstrong disposition, and not easily intimidated. My motive in coming here was to speak to my son—Charles, step outside, I want you. For remaining and condescending to speak here, I have the excuse of not wishing to see my brother's child despoiled or cajoled by a gang of coarse, vulgar impostors."

"Frank—Mr. Pyebush—let him go on," said Ted.

"For Heaven's sake, man, make a direct statement or accusation of some kind!" Lady Harriett entreated.

"All I know with reference to the brutal murder of Lady Brayle I stated publicly twenty-two years

ago. It was easy for any roadside beggar—even supposing he knew nothing of the crime except by hearsay—to build up a scheme as transparent as the present one. This man comes to live near Brayle Manor; educates his sons, as nearly as he can, like gentlemen; one introduces himself to the family under a false name—tries to win the affections of the heiress. A valuable necklace—property of the murdered lady—is found on the person of the other son. A man discharged from my employment for theft is their intimate friend, and at last is found murdered on their establishment. I leave your ladyship to put those facts together and draw your own conclusions. I have been sufficiently insulted already. Charles, follow me."

The baronet left the house—the under-secretary following him with obvious reluctance.

It is an ancient but inexhaustible literary exercise, that of comparing human beings to members of the lower animal kingdom. Sir Paul Evershed, at this juncture of our history, particularly reminds me of the snail, whose province it is to nip young flowers in the bud, and leave a disagreeable track behind him. Up to the baronet's ill-timed appearance, Lady Harriett and all other listeners had been satisfied with the truth of Miles Cassidy's simple narration, and were only anxious for a reasonable solution of its latent mysteries. Sir Paul had most successfully

thrown the apple of discord and doubt among the assembly. What if the carpenter and his two sons were, after all, impostors?

"Tell me, Cassidy," Lady Harriett asked suspiciously, "what made you think of coming to Oxford?"

"I've tould all I know, ma'am," said Miles, in somewhat surly tones. "If one of them boys is your grandson, and not my son, find him out. Maybe your heart's wiser than mine. It isn't myself that wants to part with either of 'em. Him as likes best to deny me for a father, let him spake."

"I know I am your son, father," said Ted.

"I hope—indeed I do—that I am your son," said Frank. "I never wish to know another father, not" (he glanced furtively at Bell), "for the richest prize in the world."

"That's good hearing anyhow, and not bad pay for the work I've done. We can thank these kind gentlefolks for caring so much about us; but as we've done without 'em two-and-twenty years, maybe we can go on."

"Don't be absurd, Cassidy," said Mr. Sparrowbill. "Lady Harriett's quite right, and more just towards you than you are to yourself. That man who has just left—infernal scoundrel, between ourselves, only as I've already mentioned it to him it doesn't matter—has cast an imputation on your character that you

must, and I am sure you can, clear up. Now, it *is* improbable that an illiterate man like you should bring two boys all the way from Mayo to Oxford, merely for the purpose of having them educated. How the deuce could you have learnt anything about Oxford? You can tell us, I know; but we want telling."

"I learnt it where I learnt everything I ever did learn that was worth learning," Mr. Cassidy replied, tautologically, but earnestly.

"How so?"

"From my wife. She had lived in these parts, I believe. I had heard her say it was the greatest place for larning in the world. And my oath, sworn at the bedside of those two poor dead creatures, was to bring up their children each to the way of life his parents would have had him lead. God has been good to me, and I have been able to keep my bargain. There they are. Whichever is my son, he's a good hard-fisted workman; whichever is the gentleman's son, there he is, a well-trained, book-learned gentleman."

"Both young men resemble your deceased wife, you say?"

"Both."

"And both also resemble your deceased daughter-in-law, you say, Lady Harriett?"

"Strangely!"

"Hooray, then! I've got it!"

"Got what, Sparrowbill?"

"The scent. Wait a bit. We'll make all right."

Pending Mr. Sparrowbill's rectifying process we will follow Sir Paul Evershed and his son into the street.

"I shall require your assistance, my dear boy," said the baronet, taking the under-secretary's arm.

"You will not have it," Charles answered. The young man's better nature had been thoroughly awakened by the startling disclosures of the day, and he was determined to throw over his rascally father at all hazards.

"I think you will reconsider that decision when I have explained myself. How are you off for money?"

"I have none."

"Get some."

"I cannot—will not—for your infamous purposes."

"For Heaven's sake discard those unpleasant adjectives. We have but a very few minutes to spare. That pitiful rascal in prison cannot possibly live out the night."

"What is that to me?"

"A good deal. He holds my fortune, which is synonymous with yours, in his hands."

"How so?"

"I see you are a man of business, after all, Charles. In this wise: the bogtrotter's story about the discovery of the brats is true."

"I was convinced of it."

"One of them is the heir to the Brayle estates."

"Which?"

"I can't tell at present. I am at the mercy of this dying rascal. For several months past I have been like a banker who has lived by issuing his own notes without capital. The written proofs of an heir's existence were stolen from me by that Italian. I kept them locked up with the necklace—another proof of the dead woman's identity. I lived, first of all, by holding them *in terrorem* over my brother's head, subsequently over that of Sir Cuthbert Brayle. Now, if called upon, I really could not produce them."

"Then, can it never be ascertained which of the two is the rightful heir?"

"I may as well tell you the circumstances. Lady Brayle had written a letter just after her *accouchement*, explaining the circumstances of the birth; this, with the necklace you have heard about, she had intrusted to the French surgeon who delivered her. I found the Frenchman shot, but the children were not to be found at all. Our bogtrotting friend explains their disappearance. This fellow Giovanni having a mortal *vendetta* against me, must have

discovered that I guarded the papers and necklace with especial care, and robbed me of them for the sake of putting me to an inconvenience. This lad who murdered him knows where the papers are concealed, and stipulates that I shall effect his escape from prison as the price of their restitution—an astute young ruffian!"

"And this letter would establish the identity of one of Cassidy's reputed sons as the heir of Brayle Manor?"

"Unquestionably."

"Can we speak to the fellow?"

"Decidedly. I am upon the best of terms with the governor of the prison, also with the chaplain."

"Let us go."

The father and son proceeded towards the prison, on the threshold of which they encountered Mr. Twist, emerging from the building.

"Well, Twist," said Sir Paul, benignly, "I have come again to say a word to this misguided creature. The poor wretch seems infatuated with the belief that I can do him some good."

"Don't think you'll succeed this time, Sir Paul," said Mr. Twist, whistling softly.

"No, indeed! Why not?"

"He's *dead*, sir; that's all."

"Dear me! how very shocking! His unfortunate widowed mother, how does she bear it?"

"Well, if you want my private opinion, Sir Paul, I don't think it's likely to trouble *her* much."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, if you must know, Sir Paul, *she's dead too*—and what I call a happy release, *that* is!"

"In that case, Charles," said the baronet, "I shall wish you a good evening. You will hear from me shortly."

And Sir Paul Evershed accomplished his favourite exercise of "bolting," for the last time in this history. We are happily rid of him.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH IS WHICH?

THE scene is again Miles Cassidy's sitting-room. The persons assembled are as before, with the exception of the Eversheds, father and son, and the addition of Mr. Twist, head constable, who stands erect in the centre, a small packet of papers on the table before him. He looks proud but nervous, does Mr. Twist. He has evidently done something he considers creditable, but he stands in the presence of an awe-inspiring assembly. A vigorous application of bandana to forehead, Mr. Twist appears to consider indispensable to the preservation of his composure.

"These papers were to be given into my hands, you say, Twist?" said Lady Harriett.

"Yes, your ladyship's honour," replied the constable (whose admiration for the worthy old dowager has passed from the chivalrous to the slavish); "and she told me these here very words. So

long as there was a chance of their saving her dear son's life by them, kept them she would, and made what use of 'em she could. But I was to say, come what would, no harm should come to Ned Cassidy. She would have spoke out at the right moment, cost what might; and I was to give her humble duty to Mr. Cassidy and family, and beg them not to think harshly of what she did, which I should say, *don't* for one, if I may make so bold as to offer an opinion; for if a rough is a rough, you can't help him being a woman's son for all that—can you, ladies and gentlemen?"

There was no contesting this conclusive proposition.

The papers produced by the constable consisted of three pieces, two in the form of letters, one a bill of exchange.

Lady Harriett opened one of the former, and immediately threw it back on the table, trembling violently.

"Read it for me, Sparrowbill," she said; "I cannot. It is Jacintha's writing!"

Mr. Sparrowbill and his legal friend looked over the letter. Having done so, they consulted secretly for a few moments. After which, Mr. Sparrowbill came forward as spokesman:

"Lady Harriett, Mr. Cassidy, and you two young gentlemen, this letter is of the most vital importance

to all of you. It not only corroborates Mr. Cassidy's story, but proves which of his adopted sons is the heir to the Brayle estates and title."

"Read it—read it!" said Lady Harriett.

"Read it," said Ned Cassidy. "Frank, old boy, this will give you a title, a fortune, and a handsome wife."

"Don't read it," said Frank, convulsively. "Tear it! burn it! Let me live and die Frank Cassidy."

"Hould there, darlings," said Miles, controlling himself with an effort. "The paper must be read, whatever it is. Remember, one of ye only belongs to me, the other I have only held in trust. Only tell me this, ma'am—if this mighty sacret of my life is now to be revealed—if either of them boys belongs to you, and not to me—if I am to lose a son, and you to find a grandson—tell me before the sacret is known, have I been what the blessed Scripture calls an unjust steward or no? Is either of them young men a piece of work that a poor untaught labourer like myself need be ashamed of offering to a lady like yourself? Could your own dead son—the baronet and scholar that I scarcely ever heard of till this day—could he have made a better man of either?"

"Miles Cassidy," said Lady Harriett, rising and kissing the old carpenter's hand with an indescribable gesture of reverence, "if I am about to find a child you shall not lose one. Never was steward more

faithful to his trust. Let the letter be read; it will only serve to enrich and ennoble one brother, but the other will surely be the gainer."

"If Frank is the baronet, I can still marry him," thought Bell Evershed.

"If Edward is the baronet, I can never marry him," thought Biddy Cassidy.

Mr. Sparrowbill proceeded to read the letter, which was closely written, on discoloured paper, in a variety of inks. The following is a copy of the document:

"WEXFORD, —— 1798.

"MY DEAR MOTHER (for I must call you so now, having lost my own),—I have so much to tell you that I scarcely know how to begin. Lucius, apprehending some political troubles that I do not understand, insists upon my going to England. So I shall be with you in a week or two. Mr. Evershed is to accompany me, having business to transact for Lucius. Considering my situation, I need scarcely tell you, that since it seems Lucius cannot be near me, I would rather be with you than any being in this world—except perhaps one; and here I have to tell you a story which is the principal motive of a letter, which I don't know when I shall be able to finish or send. Perhaps I shall bring it with me in my writing-desk, after all. You remember little Mary, who disappeared so strangely from among us. I have just heard of her. She is married to a labouring man in a town called Killala, in Mayo. The motives for her disappearance were more heroic than I can tell you; indeed, I dare not, even if I could, for her secret is one I must not betray, even to you. Perhaps I shall do

so when we meet; perhaps you know it already. At any rate, it is not mine for the present. You know how dearly I loved her. She was married, it seems, on the same day as we were. She is likely to have a baby at the same time as myself. If I could only find the means of persuading her to come to England and stay with us. * *

"I resume my letter, I scarcely know where or when. I am at a village of which I do not know the name. Lucius is killed. Mr. Evershed has twice endeavoured to endanger my life. I am sure his motive is to destroy my unborn child. I scarcely know what I am writing. He is a bad man; I must escape from him. I cannot cross the Channel. My only hope is in Mary. I will try and find her. That man will kill me." * * *

The remainder of the letter was written in different ink, in a sprawling, unequal handwriting: it ran as follows:

"DEAR MOTHER,—These are the last words I shall pen. I reached Mary's house. My little boy was born immediately after. Mary had a little boy soon after. The shock, I suppose, hastened her time. They are fighting in the town. Mary is dead. I am sure I am dying. The French doctor has promised to send this letter to you. Take care of Mary's baby and mine. He has marked my boy with a cross on his arm, and Mary's boy with a diamond. The Frenchman is a kind man, and he knew Lucius in France. . . . Keep Mary's secret, if you know it. It was her dying wish. Farewell. "JACINTHA BRAYLÉ."

Mr. Sparrowbill had not finished reading this singular epistle ere the two brothers had bared their arms, showing their distinguishing marks.

"By Jove! I'm a baronet!" exclaimed the astonished Ned.

"And I am a carpenter!" said the author of *Anne Boleyn and other Poems*, in broken-hearted accents.

"Not if I know it, Frank, old boy. We'll do credit to the governor yet. You can't grudge me my baronetcy—if mine it is to be—half as much as I grudge you your father."

"Good hearing that—good hearing!" Miles Cassidy murmured.

"Can this be real?" inquired Lady Harriett, stupefied.

"Undoubtedly, madam," said the old lawyer; "provided you are satisfied that this is your daughter-in-law's handwriting."

"I would swear to it," said the old lady.

"So would I," said Mr. Sparrowbill.

"So would I," said Miss Gertrude Brayle.

Miss Bophus would have sworn to it too, in the most positive manner, as to anything else asserted by her diminutive patroness. But her testimony was not considered valid or desirable.

"Holy mother!" Miles Cassidy ejaculated; "and to think that the gentleman should be my son after all! I thought it was the blatherumskite!"

"Let me be your son still, father," said Ned. "Let us keep the old family together. Am I Ned Cassidy, or Sir Edward Brayle?"

"Sir Edward Brayle—clearly," said Miss Gertrude, as one having authority.

"In that case, Biddy Cassidy, will you be Lady Brayle?"

"Never!" was Biddy's astonishing answer, as she ran from the room, burying her face in her apron.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Cymon Pyebush, mentally. "Wonder if she'll consent to be Mrs. Cymon after all!"

"Miles Cassidy," said Lady Harriett Brayle, "I thank you from my heart for preserving my children's child as you have done. Tell me how I can repay you."

"You can't, ma'am. I thought I loved the gentleman best, but it breaks my heart to lose the blatherumskite. However, take him away if he belongs to you."

"Father!" exclaimed the newly established baronet, "I would rather be your son and Biddy's husband than the proudest peer in the realm. If I am to be neither, life can have no charms for me."

"Right, by Jove!" exclaimed the Honourable Cymon Pyebush.

"How about the old buffer's mysterious wife? Who the deuce was she?"

Mr. Bloss put the above question to Mr. Sparrowbill, as they were walking amicably in the evening

towards Brayle Manor. Mr. Long and Mr. Charles Evershed completed the group of pedestrians.

"Any of you understand French?" Mr. Sparrowbill asked in reply.

"Well—a little," Mr. Bloss responded reluctantly.

"I read and write it pretty fluently," said Mr. Charles Evershed.

"I speak it like a native," Mr. Long observed.

"At any rate you all understand what is meant by a *secret de Polichinelle*—a secret that is no secret at all. I remember the whole circumstance—just as do a score of people. Jacintha's mother, a Spanish woman, went wrong—that is the plain English of it. She had an illegitimate daughter before her marriage, whom she was imprudent enough to bring up in her own family, as a waiting-maid or foster-sister to her legitimate daughter. The likeness between the two girls was remarked as they grew up. Little Mary—a fine, sensitive, poetic nature, as her influence upon a fellow like old Cassidy sufficiently proves—ran away to a remote part of Ireland, from a romantic desire to conceal her mother's shame. They were lovely girls both: I remember them both perfectly well—seldom I do remember anything so agreeable. Immensely attached to each other."

"Then the new Sir Edward Brayle and his foster-brother are really half-cousins, if there exist such a relationship?" said Mr. Charles Evershed.

"Certainly."

"Then in that case," said Mr. Long, as if inspired suddenly by a brilliant thought, "I propose——"

"What?"

"That we go and drink their healths in the next public-house."

"No objection," said Mr. Sparrowbill; "only I remember tasting some very bad beer on this road when I was a young man and a fisherman. However, let's try it."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONTRACT FINISHED.

LITTLE of our story remains to be told. Some litigation was found necessary for the establishment of Ned Cassidy's claim to the Brayle baronetcy; but established it eventually was. There was no serious difficulty about it. Miles Cassidy's story was found to be perfectly coherent with the accredited statement of Sir Paul Evershed, who in his report of Lady Brayle's death had (oddly enough) merely suppressed truths without inventing a single falsehood. The nominal baronet—Sir Cuthbert Brayle—was a politician of some influence. Finding his position sufficiently established—and the title being pretty well all that was worth disputing in the family inheritance—he had made no prolonged opposition, more especially as Ted magnanimously refused to dispossess him of any lands and tenements in his possession during his lifetime. All the property claimed by Sir

Edward Brayle was that hitherto considered as belonging to his cousin, Miss Bell Evershed. Of this he ruthlessly dispossessed the supposed heiress, for the purpose of sharing it equally with his adopted brother Frank, on the condition of Bell Evershed becoming the poet's wife. Frank Cassidy, the wealthy man, wooing Bell Evershed, the needy dependent on her cousin's bounty, was of course in a very different position from Frank Gerald, the needy literary adventurer, aspiring to a union with the heiress of Brayle Manor. So Frank and Bell were speedily married.

They were married some years before Sir Edward Brayle found a wife. Over and over again he had offered his hand to Biddy Cassidy. Over and over again Biddy had refused it. She had rejected him when he was poor and despised; could she accept him now that he was wealthy and respected? This foolish but natural battle of pride continued for a long time. The new baronet became loose, reckless, and dissipated. He declared to his adopted father and brother—to all his friends—that existence, wealth, and good repute, were valueless to him without Biddy.

Providence was kind enough to give a solution of the difficulty—it is true, at the expense of an honest martyr; but it is by such means that human good is usually brought about.

One day Biddy received the following letter:—

"ADORED MISS CASSIDY,—Under no other circumstances would I venture to address you as I now presume to. Thanks to you, I attained my degree years ago, and was installed in the family living. But to be a mere country parson's wife is what I could never have asked you. Since then, however, many deaths in my family have put me in possession of a title, which I humbly and devotedly ask you to share with me, if you will. If I am unworthy of such an honour, think of me still as your grateful friend and admirer, "RAVENTREE."

"A woman who refuses an earl," thought Biddy, when she had wiped away the tears caused by honest Cymon's kindly tribute of affection, "may be at least excused for making love to a baronet."

So Biddy refused the earl and proposed to the baronet, who, jumping at the unexpected offer, married and reformed immediately.

The baronet and his lady have a numerous family.

The earl is a lonely old bachelor—not an unhappy one, though. He visits the baronet frequently, and is godfather to several of the baronet's children. He is believed to entertain the same chivalrous, respectful admiration for the baronet's lady as he did on the first day of his discovering her in the act of painting the name on a boat. His lordship has forgotten most of the Greek imparted to him by Biddy, but not one particle of the affection with which she inspired him.

And now I may be permitted to proceed to my epilogue.

Some thirty years ago, a gentleman with whom we have been acquainted by the name of Mr. Charles Evershed, entered Sir Edward Brayle's library while that baronet was occupied in the perusal of certain papers on the subject of agricultural improvements (our baronet had become a model landowner) and the fumigation of a Trichinopoli cheroot. The ministerial gentleman looked rather queer—somewhat as though the red tape with which his class is usually identified had got into his eyes.

"What's up, Charles?" inquired the baronet. The two young men had become great friends.

The Right Honourable Charles passed his hands over his pink-edged eyes uncomfortably.

"I have just received a startling piece of news."

"Good or bad?"

"I scarcely dare say. Read."

He laid a newspaper on the table—pointing to a marked paragraph—and threw himself into an armchair, burying his face in his hands. Sir Edward Brayle read the following paragraph:

"FATAL DUEL AT BADEN-BADEN.—We regret to announce the lamented decease of Sir Paul Evershed, who succumbed to the wounds received in his unfortunate duel with the Vicomte Jules de Corbeaux, already noticed in these

columns. The event, which has plunged a distinguished circle in the deepest grief, was the result of a misunderstanding at play. The title of the lamented baronet—who was universally respected—descends to his only son, His Majesty's Under-Secretary of State for the —— Department, his only surviving issue. It is hoped that the calamitous event will not be the means of depriving the country of the Right Honourable Baronet's ministerial services at the present crisis, when men of talent and integrity are so much needed."

The right honourable baronet was sobbing piteously. His friend rose kindly, and patted him on the shoulder.

"Keep up, Charles. There is no occasion for sorrow. You are a baronet, which is not much; but you are a free man, which is a great deal. Do not regret that dead rascal."

"Would to God I could!" sobbed the poor statesman. "I am only sorry to feel that I am glad. I weep, because I could dance for very joy."

"Do neither, old fellow. Take my word for it, there is a good deal of bosh talked about natural affection. The ducks out in the yard there are quite right to care more about the old hen who has reared them, than about the unknown bird who merely *laid* them for her own convenience. I am a living illustration of the principle. I almost worship my dear father Cassidy, who has made me the strong, healthy, and, I hope, honest man that I am. I know his

footfall hundreds of yards off. I seem to divine instinctively whether his little room is empty or not, before I approach his door. I dare not look forward to the time that must come when I must help Frank to place his noble old body in the family vault. But do you suppose I feel any filial thrill when I pass the portrait of my real father, Sir Lucius, whom it is now discovered I so strongly resemble? I never knew him, and don't seem at all sorry for it. By a parity of reasoning, why should you be sorry that an unmitigated scoundrel should have been swept off the face of the earth merely because he happened to be your father? Or rather, why pretend to be sorry, for there must be hypocrisy in the matter?"

"Spare me, Ned, and spare him," sobbed the new baronet.

"I shall certainly not spare you if you persist in tormenting yourself."

A beautiful radiant lady came sailing into the room. This was Lady Brayle, once Biddy Cassidy, now a leader of the fashion, and a popular novelist, if you please; but still speaking the brogue of her infancy, when excited.

"What's the matter, Ted?" her ladyship inquired.

"Why, Charley here is making himself miserable over the death of his father—the best thing that could have happened."

"Hush, Ted!"

Lady Brayle placed a white finger upon her husband's lips, and pointed through the window to where a noble-looking old man sat in his shirt sleeves, with an old frieze coat loosely tied about his shoulders. The old gentleman was smoking a very short black pipe, and his face was turned placidly towards the setting sun.

"There are few fathers like ours," her ladyship said.

Sir Edward Brayle gave his handsome wife a rapid unseen cuddle, pressed his friend the new baronet apologetically by the hand, and sallied forth on to the terrace, in order to enjoy himself heartily in the society of the old man in the frieze coat.

Miles Cassidy had an open book in his hand.

"Hallo, father!" cried Sir Edward. "What 's this new move? Taking to read at your time of life?"

"No, darling," said the old man, fondling the hairy hand of the baronet who stooped by him, and smoothing his shock head as though he had been a child, "that 's a thrate not for me. But the colleen told me it was Frank's writing, and I took a pleasure in looking at the outside shape of it like."

"Frank 's getting to be a great man, governor."

"So they say, darling; making pothry, and spaches, and all that. It bates me hollow, the son of a poor working fellow like me to turn out a

gentleman and a janius. Faith, but sometimes I can hardly believe the crass on his arm."

Her ladyship had now joined the speakers.

"Why, uncle dear," she said, "don't you know that everybody remarks that now Frank is getting middle-aged and grey he is the very image of you?"

Miles Cassidy laughed.

"Faith, and I wish he'd a thought of that before. It might have saved a deal of onconvanience."

"Perhaps deprived me of a father," urged the baronet.

"No, no, alanna—I hope not. It has been all for the best. And Frank's growing like me?"

"Wonderfully."

"Thrue, no doubt, as to the bald head and grey hairs. But where he gets the pothry and the janius from bates me into fits."

Lady Brayle knelt before the old man's knees, clasped his hands in her own, kissed them, and looked fondly into his face as she said:

"Father——"

"Well, colleen?"

"Do you not know that your whole life has been a greater poem than ever Frank could dream of?"

Miles Cassidy played with the golden head of his adopted daughter, while her husband clasped the old man's horny palm lovingly, and the three sat gazing at the setting sun.

"There 's more happiness in this world than ever I dreamt on," said Cassidy, "since the old time when she—that was the beginning of it all—was with me. It 's only Frank and *his* bright-eyed darling we want to make it complete."

A travelling-carriage drove up to the gate almost as he spoke.

"It 's themselves!" said the old man, starting up and moving to meet his son.

"Stop!" cried Charles Evershed, darting down the lawn; "I must speak to Frank before any of the rest of you."

He ran to meet Frank, with whom he had a brief consultation, and came back with a radiant countenance, presenting the new arrivals.

"I must be the first to announce you. Permit me to introduce Sir Francis and Lady Cassidy."

"*Sir* Francis!" exclaimed old Miles, with an unusual expression of countenance.

"Just so, father," said Frank, laughing. "All cousin Charley's doing. He would make it the only favour he chose to ask of his ministry. And, as he very properly observed, it will look all the better on the title-pages of my books. Besides, her ladyship here is immensely pleased with it, I can tell you."

"Nonsense!" said Lady Cassidy, pinching her husband's arm.

"I too am a baronet, Frank, as I suppose you know," said Charles, sadly.

"I do, Charles, and scarcely know whether to congratulate or condole with you, owing your advancement to——"

"My father!" said Charles, bitterly; "even as you do. But in how different a sense."

The happy and gifted family—for poor Charles's sorrow was not very deeply rooted—dined joyously together. When they separated for the night, Miles Cassidy begged his darling niece (the favourite, after all, as he said, of his four children) to bring her prayer-book to his little room, and read to him the *Nunc dimittis:* "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

It was a refrain that the old man delighted to repeat to the end of his days.

But many peaceful years were suffered to elapse ere Miles Cassidy was called upon to take his departure. The death-scene came at last—as placid a one as ever was known. Two handsome grey-headed men bent over a venerable corpse. One of them, striving against hope, placed his hand on the dead man's bosom. It came in contact with a tiny leathern bag, which was found to contain a lock of jet-black hair.

"Did you know he wore this, Frank?" Sir Edward Brayle inquired, through his fast-falling tears.

"Never."

"Take it—it is your mother's hair: it belongs to you more than to me."

"It belongs to neither of us, brother, but to him. Let us not rob him of it."

Sir Francis Cassidy kissed the lock of his mother's hair, and replaced it on the bosom where it had reposed for forty years.

Miles Cassidy lies buried in the parish church of A——. Sir Edward Brayle erected a splendid monument in commemoration of his foster-father's simple virtues. It was observed that Sir Edward's spirits lost much of their buoyancy after the old man's death; and the baronet, to this day (he is in his sixtieth year), has a curious fancy for dressing himself—when in the privacy of his study—in an old ragged frieze coat, which never could have been made for him, and which he wears, Mexican fashion, with the sleeves tied round his neck.

The heir to the Brayle baronetcy is a fine young man of about thirty, and will become Sir Miles in the natural course of things. The highest compliment this gentleman has ever had paid to him was from his father, who told him, on the occasion of his achieving high honours at the college of St. Ogive's,

that even the old man (meaning the late Miles Cassidy) might have been proud of him.

Good-bye, reader. Mr. Cassidy has done his work, and received his wages.

THE END.

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